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THE

LIFE

OF

VOLTAIRE,

BY THE

MARQUIS DE CONDORCET.

To which are added,

MEMOIRS OF VOLTAIRE,

WRITTEN BY HIMSELF.

TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I

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THE

LIFE

OF

VOLTAIRE.

THE life of Voltaire should necessarily be the history of the progress of the arts as promoted by his genius, of the power which he exercised over the opinions of his age, and of the long war which in his youth he declared against prejudice, and which he maintained to the day of his death.

When the influence of a philoſopher extends itſelf to the multitude, when it is ſudden and felt at each inſtant of his life, he is indebted for this influence to his character, to his mode of obſervation, and to his conduct, as much as to his works. Every circumſtance relating to ſuch a man promotes the ſtudy of the human mind; with which we cannot hope to become acquainted if we do not obſerve its properties as they exiſt in thoſe to whom Nature has been prodigal of her riches and her power, and if we do not ſeek in ſuch minds what they poſſeſs in common with others, and in what they are diſtinguiſhed. Man is in general indebted for his opinions, and

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even for his paſſions, and his character, to thoſe by whom he is ſurrounded; he derives them from the laws, the prejudices of his country, as the plant receives nutriment from the ſoil and the elements. When we contemplate the vulgar mind, we diſcover the power to which we are ſubjected by Nature, (or habit); but not the ſecret of internal ſtrength, nor the laws of the human underſtanding.

François Marie Arouet, who by aſſuming the name of Voltaire has rendered it ſo famous, was born at Chatenay, on the 20th of February, 1694, and was baptized at Paris, in the church

of St. André-des-Arcs, on the 22d of November in the ſame year. His exceſſive weakneſs was the cauſe of this delay, which, during life, occaſioned doubts concerning the place and time of his birth. Fontenelle, in like manner, was obliged to be privately baptized, becauſe his life was deſpaired of, from the feebleneſs of his infancy. It is ſomewhat ſingular that theſe two men, both ſo famous in this age, whoſe lives and underſtandings were each of ſuch long duration, ſhould mutually be born languid and feeble.

The father of M. de Voltaire exerciſed the office of treaſurer to the cham-

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ber of accounts; his mother, *Marguerite d'Aumart*, was of a noble family of Poitou. Their ſon has been reproached for having taken the name of Voltaire: that is, for having followed a cuſtom at that time generally practiſed by the rich citizens and younger ſons, who, leaving the family name to the heir, aſſumed that of a fief, or perhaps of a country houſe. His birth was queſtioned in numerous libels. His enemies, among men of literature, ſeemed to fear that the faſhionable world would too readily ſacrifice its prejudices to the pleaſure found in his ſociety, and the admiration his talents inſpired, and that a man of letters ſhould be treated with too much

 equality.

equality. Such reproaches did him honour; malignity does not attack the birth of a man of literature, but from a ſecret conſciouſneſs, which it cannot ſtifle, that it is wholly unable to diminiſh his perſonal fame.

The fortune which M. Arouet the father enjoyed was doubly advantageous to his ſon; it procured him the advantages of education, without which genius never attains thoſe heights to which it might otherwiſe ariſe. If we examine modern hiſtory, we ſhall find that all men of the firſt order, all thoſe whoſe works have approached perfection, had not to repair the defects of education.

Nor

Nor was the advantage of being born to an independent fortune leſs ineſtimable. M. de Voltaire never felt the miſery of being obliged to abandon his liberty that he might procure ſubſiſtence; to ſubject his genius to labour, which the neceſſity of living enforced; nor to flatter the prejudices, or the paſſions, of a patron. His mind was not enſlaved by ſuch habitual fears, which not only impede invention, but impreſs the character of incertitude and feebleneſs on every effort of the imagination. His youth, undiſturbed by the doubts and fears of poverty, did not expoſe him to the danger of contracting that ſervile timidity which inſpires the weak mind with habi-

tual dependence; or that acrid, reftlefs, and fufpicious irritability which is an infallible confequence to the man of genius, when contending between that dependence to which he is by neceffity fubjected, and that freedom which the fublime thoughts by which he is occupied demand.

The young Arouet was fent to the Jefuifts college, where the fons of the firft nobility, except thofe of the Janfenifts, received their education. The Janfenifts, who were hated at court, were feldom feen among men who, being at that time obliged by cuftom to chufe a religion which they did not underftand, naturally

naturally adopted that which beſt could promote their temporal intereſt. The profeſſors of rhetorick, under whom he was placed, were Father Porée and Father Jay: the firſt, being a man of underſtanding, and of a good heart, diſcovered the ſeeds of a future greatneſs in his ſcholar; and the latter, ſtruck with the boldneſs of his opinions and the independence of his mind, predicted that he would become the apoſtle of deiſm in France; both of which prophecies were verified by time.

When he left college, he again found the Abbé de Châteauneuf, his god-father and the friend of his mother, an intimate

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at home. The Abbé was one of thoſe men who, having entered into the eccleſiaſtic eſtate from complaiſance, or from momentary ambition not native to their mind, afterwards ſacrifice fortune and ſacerdotal dignities to the love of living at large, being unable continually to wear the maſk of hypocriſy.

The Abbé de Chateauneuf was intimate with Ninon de l' Enclos, whom, for her probity, her underſtanding, and her freedom of thought, he long had pardoned in deſpight of the ſomewhat notorious adventures of her youth. The faſhionable world were pleaſed that ſhe had refuſed the invitation of her former friend,

friend, Madame de Maintenon, who had offered to invite her to court, on condition that ſhe would become a devotee. The Abbé de Chateauneuf had preſented Voltaire to Ninon. Though but a boy, he already was a poet; already began to teize his Janſeniſt brother by his trifling epigrams, and to pleaſe himſelf with reciting the Moïſade of Rouſſeau.

Ninon had taken delight in the pupil of her friend, and had left him by will 2000 livres (about 80 guineas) to purchaſe books. Thus was he taught, by fortunate circumſtances, even in infancy and before his underſtanding was form-

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ed, to regard ſtudy and labours of the mind as pleaſing and honourable employments; thus did he learn, by the ſociety of people ſuperior to vulgar opinions, that the mind of man is born free, and that he has a right to judge whatever he can comprehend; while, by a cowardly condeſcenſion to prejudice, the common courſe of education preſents nothing to childhood but the diſgraceful marks of ſervitude.

Hypocriſy and intolerance were predominant at the court of Louis the XIVth. which was much more ſeriouſly occupied in effecting the ruin of Janſeniſm

Janſeniſm than in relieving the ſufferings of the people. The report of his incredulity had occaſioned Catinat to loſe the confidence which was due to his virtues and his abilities for war. De Vendôme was reproached with occaſionally neglecting maſs; and the ſucceſs of the heretick Marlborough, and the infidel Eugene, was attributed to his want of devotion. This hypocriſy had diſguſted thoſe whom it could not corrupt; and, in averſion to the auſterities of Verſailles, the moſt faſhionable ſocieties of Paris affected to carry their liberty and the love of pleaſure even to licentiouſneſs.

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The Abbé de Chateauneuf introduced the young Voltaire to theſe ſocieties, and particularly to the company of the Duke de Sully, the Marquis de la Fare, the Abbé Servien, the Abbé de Chaulieu, and the Abbé Courtin; who were often joined by the Prince de Conti, and the grand Prior de Vendôme.

M. Arouet imagined his ſon was ruined, when he was told that he wrote poetry and frequented the ſociety of people of faſhion. He wiſhed to make him a judge, and ſaw him employed on a tragedy. This family quarrel ended by ſending the young Voltaire to the Marquis

Marquis de Chateauneuf, the French ambaſſador in Holland.

His exile was not of long duration. Madame du Noyer, who had fled thither with her two daughters rather to avoid her huſband than from zeal for the proteſtant religion, was then at the Hague, where ſhe lived by intrigues and libels, and proved from her conduct that ſhe did not go thither in ſearch of liberty of conſcience.

M. de Voltaire became enamoured of one of her daughters; and the mother, finding that the only advantage ſhe could gain from his attachment was that of

making it public, carried her complaints to the ambaſſador, who forbade his young dependent to continue his viſits to Mademoiſelle du Noyer; and ſent him back to his family for having diſobeyed his orders.

Madame du Noyer failed not to print this ſtory with the Letters of the young Arouet to her daughter, hoping that this already well known name would promote the ſale of her book; and vaunted of her maternal ſeverity and delicacy in the very libel in which ſhe proclaimed her daughter's diſhonour.

The fine feelings of the author of Zaïre and Tancrede are not diſcoverable

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in theſe letters. The ſenſations of impaſſioned youth are ſtrong, but their gradations it is unable to diſtinguiſh; it neither can ſelect thoſe ſtrong and rapid traits which characteriſe paſſion, nor find terms which paint its feelings to the imagination, and infuſe them into the ſoul of the reader; while devoured by love, the moſt ſincere and the moſt ardent, it is apparently dull, cold, or extravagant. The talent of painting the paſſions for the theatre appears to be one of the laſt which diſcovers itſelf in poets. Racine had given no tokens of it either in *Les Frères Ennemis*, or in *Alexandre*; and Brutus preceded Zaïre. Not only, muſt the paſſions have been

 felt

felt before they can be defcribed, but their emotions and effects muft have been remarked when they have ceafed to lord it over the mind, and when they exift only in the recollection. The heart is fufficient to make us fenfible of their exiftence; but, to exprefs them with energy and truth, the foul muft have long been under their influence, and experience muft have been improved by reflection.

The youth, when returned to Paris, foon forgot his love; but he did not forget to ufe every effort that he might wreft a young and eftimable woman, who was natively virtuous, from a cor-

rupt

rupt and intriguing mother. He employed the zeal of Profelytifm*. He was aided by feveral bifhops, and even jefuits. The project failed, but Voltaire had afterward the good fortune to be of fervice to Mademoifelle du Noyer, when fhe had married the Baron de Vinterfeld.

His father, however, finding him perfift in writing poetry, and living at large, forbade him his houfe. The moft fubmiffive letters made no impreffion on him; the fon even afked permiffion to go to America, provided that before his

* *Il employa le zèle du Profélitifme*; the meaning, I imagine, is, that he made her a convert from the proteftant to the catholick faith.

departure he might but be permitted to kneel at his feet; but there was no choice, he muſt determine not to depart for America, but to bind himſelf to an attorney. He did not here remain long; M. de Caumartin, the friend of M. Arouet, pitied the fate of his ſon, and requeſted permiſſion to take him to St. Ange; where, removed from thoſe ſocieties which alarmed paternal affection, he might reflect on, and make choice of a profeſſion. Here he met with Caumartin, the elder, a reſpectable old man, who was paſſionately fond of Henry the IVth, and Sully, at that time too much forgotten by the nation. Caumartin had been intimate with the beſt informed

men

men of the reign of Louis the XIVth and was acquainted with the moſt ſecret anecdotes, ſuch as they really happened. Theſe he took a pleaſure to recount, and Voltaire returned from St. Ange, occupied by the project of writing an epic poem, of which Henry the IVth ſhould be the hero, and ardently deſirous of ſtudying the Hiſtory of France. To this journey are we indebted for the Henriade, and the age of Louis XIV.

The death of this monarch was recent; the people, of whom he long had been the idol, the very people who had pardoned his profuſion, his wars, and his deſpotiſm, and had applauded his

perſecution of the proteſtants, inſulted his memory by teſtifying indecent joy. A bull, obtained from Rome againſt a book of devotion, had occaſioned the Pariſians to forget that glory of which they ſo long had been enamoured. Satires on the memory of Louis the Great were as numerous as eulogies had been during his life. Voltaire being accuſed of having written one of theſe ſatires, was ſent to the baſtile. The poem ended with the following line:

J'ai vu ces maux, et je n'ai pas vingt ans *.

Voltaire was then upwards of two and twenty, and the police took this confor-

* Theſe evils have I ſeen, yet have not reached my twentieth year.

mity

nity of age to be proof ſufficient to deprive him of his liberty.

It was in the baſtile that the young poet ſketched his poem of the League, corrected his tragedy of Oedipus, which he had begun long before, and wrote ſome merry verſes on the misfortune of being there a priſoner. The regent Duke of Orleans, being informed of his innocence, reſtored him to freedom, and granted him a recompenſe.

"I thank your royal highneſs," ſaid Voltaire, "for having provided me with food; but I hope you will not, hereafter, trouble yourſelf concerning my lodging."

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The tragedy of Oedipus was performed in 1718. The author had hitherto been known only by his fugitive pieces, by ſome epiſtles which breathed the ſpirit of Chaulieu, but written more correctly, and by an ode which had vainly contended for the prize beſtowed by the French academy; to this a ridiculous piece written by the Abbé du Jarri had been preferred. The theme propoſed by the academy was the decoration of the altar of Notre Dame; for Louis the XIVth, after having reigned ſeventy years, recollected it was time to perform the promiſe of Louis the XIIIth. Thus was the ſubject of the firſt ſerious poem, written by Voltaire, devotion. Poſſeſſed of

of native and unerring tafte, he would not mingle the paffion of love with a tale fo horrid as that of Oedipus; and had been daring enough to prefent his piece to the theatre without having paid this tribute to cuftom. But it was rejected. The affembled comedians took it amifs that the author fhould dare to difpute their judgment. "The young man well deferves," faid Dufrefne, "as a punifhment for his pride, that his tragedy fhould be played with the long vile fcene which he has tranflated from Sophocles."

Voltaire was obliged to cede, and to infert a whole epifode of love. The piece was applauded, though in defpight

of

of the epiſode; and the long vile ſcene from Sophocles inſured its ſucceſs. La Motte, who was at that time the firſt among men of letters, ſaid in his approbation that this tragedy gave promiſe of a worthy ſucceſſor to Corneille and Racine; and the homage thus rendered by a rival, whoſe fame was eſtabliſhed, and who had reaſon to fear he might ſee himſelf ſurpaſſed, muſt for ever do honour to the character of La Motte.

But Voltaire, proclaimed a man of genius and a philoſopher to a croud of inferior authors and fanaticks of all ſects, even then gained a combination of enemies, whom the riſing generations of

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ſixty years have continued to ſupply, and who often have moleſted his long and glorious career. The following celebrated lines—

Nos Prêtres ne ſont pas ce qu'un vain peuple penſe;
*Notre Crédulité fait toute leur Science**.

were the firſt ſignal of a war, which not even the death of Voltaire could extinguiſh.

At one of the repreſentations of Oedipus, Voltaire appeared on the ſtage, bearing up the train of the high prieſt. The Marchioneſs de Villars aſked who

* Our prieſts are not what the fooliſh people ſuppoſe; their whole knowledge is derived from our credulity.

was

was that young man who wiſhed the piece might be condemned; ſhe was told it was the author. This thoughtleſs act, which ſpoke a man ſo ſuperior to the trifling anxieties of ſelf-love, made the marchioneſs deſirous of his acquaintance. Voltaire, being admitted her viſitor, conceived a paſſion for her, the firſt, and the moſt ſerious he ever felt. He was unſucceſsful; and was for a conſiderable time diverted from ſtudy, which had already become neceſſary to his exiſtence. He never, afterwards, mentioned this ſubject but with a ſenſation of regret, and almoſt of remorſe.

Having

Having freed himſelf from his paſſion, he continued the Henriade; and wrote the tragedy of Artémire. An actreſs, whom he had formed, and who was at once his miſtreſs and his pupil, played the principal character. The public, who had done juſtice to Oedipus, was (to ſay the leaſt) ſevere to Artémire. This is a common conſequence of ſucceſs; nor is ſecret averſion for acknowledged ſuperiority the only cauſe, though this averſion has the art to profit by a natural feeling which renders us more difficult to be pleaſed in proportion as we have more to hope.

This tragedy was of no other value to Voltaire than that of obtaining permiſſion for him to return to Paris, whence he had been baniſhed by his intimacy with the enemies of the regent, and among others with the Duke de Richelieu and the famous Baron de Gortz. Thus did this ambitious man, whoſe vaſt projects included all Europe, and threatened to overturn its governments, chuſe a young poet for his friend and almoſt for his confident. Men of genius ſeek for, and at once know each other; they have a common language, which they alone can ſpeak and underſtand.

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In 1722, Voltaire accompanied Madame de Rupelmonde into Holland. He was defirous, at Bruffels, of being acquainted with Rouffeau, whofe misfortunes he pitied, and whofe poetic talent he efteemed. The love of his art was too powerful for that juft contempt which he ought to have conceived for the character of Rouffeau. Voltaire confulted him on his Poem on the League; and read his Epiftle to Urania to him, written for Madame de Rupelmonde. This poem was the firft monument of his freedom of thinking, and of his talent of treating on moral and metaphyfical fubjects in verfe, and of rendering them popular.

Rouffeau,

Rouſſeau, on his part, read an Ode addreſſed to Poſterity, which Voltaire, as it is pretended, then told him would never arrive at the place to which it was addreſſed. He likewiſe read the Judgment of Pluto, which was as quickly forgotten as the ode. The two poets parted irreconcileable foes. Rouſſeau violently attacked Voltaire, who continued patiently to ſuffer during fifteen years. It is aſtoniſhing to think that the author of ſo many licentious epigrams, in which the clergy were continually made the ſubject of ridicule and opprobium, ſhould ſeriouſly aſſign the thoughtleſs behaviour of Voltaire during maſs and his Epiſtle to Urania as the cauſe

of

of his hatred. But Rousseau had assumed the mask of devotion, which was then an honourable asylum for such as had suffered in the world's opinion: a safe and commodious asylum which philosophy, among the other evils of which it is accused, has unfortunately, for hypocrites, eternally closed.

In 1724, Voltaire presented the world with Mariamne, which was but Artémire under new names, but with a less complicated and less romantic fable. It was written in the very style of Racine, and was forty times performed. In his preface, the author opposed the opinion of La Motte who, possessed of much un-

derſtanding and reaſon, but little ſenſible of the charms of harmony, diſcovered no other merit in verſification than that of difficulties overcome; nor any thing more than a formal cuſtom, in poetry, invented to eaſe the memory, and to which habit alone had attributed charms. In his letters, printed at the end of Oedipus, he had before combatted the opinions of the ſame poet, who regarded the obſervance of the three Unities as another prejudice.

We ought to think ourſelves obliged to thoſe who, like La Motte, dare to oppoſe common and received opinions. In order to defend ancient rules, they muſt

muſt neceſſarily be examined; and if received opinions, on examination, be found true, we enjoy the advantage of believing that from reaſon to which we had previouſly given our aſſent from habit; if falſe, the world is then freed from an error.

It is no uncommon thing, however, for men to be angry at thoſe who oblige them to ſcrutinize what had been admitted upon truſt. The minds, which, like that of Montaigne, quietly ſlumber on the pillow of ſcepticiſm, are not common; and ſtill leſs common are thoſe who are tormented by the deſire of diſcovering truth. The vulgar love to

 believe

believe without proof; and to cherifh their fecurity in blind faith, as a thing neceffary to their eafe and fafety.

About the fame time, the Henriade appeared under the name of the League: an imperfect copy, ftole from the author, was clandeftinely printed, in which there were not only parts omitted, but fome vacancies were fupplied.

Thus France was at length poffeffed of an Epic Poem. It muft be regretted, no doubt, that Voltaire, the fables of whofe tragedies are fo full of action, who has made the paffions fpeak a language fo natural and fo true, and who could

could paint them ſo effectually as well by analizing their ſentiments as by their ſudden ebullitions, ſhould not have diſplayed in the Henriade thoſe talents which never before were combined in the ſame man to ſo great a degree. Yet, a ſubject ſo well known and ſo recent gave but little room for the imagination of the poet. The gloomy and perſecuting ſpirit of fanaticiſm, exerciſing itſelf on ſubaltern characters, could excite little more than horror. The chiefs of the league were animated by an ambition which hypocriſy debaſed. The hero of the poem, gallant, brave, and humane, but continually ſubject to misfortune which alighted on him alone,

 could

could intereſt only by his courage and his clemency. Nor was it poſſible that the unnatural converſion of Henry the IVth ſhould form an heroic cataſtrophe.

But though the Henriade in pathos, variety, and action, be inferior to thoſe epic poems which were then in poſſeſſion of univerſal admiration, yet by how many new beauties was this inferiority compenſated? Never was philoſophy, ſo profound and ſo true, embelliſhed by verſes more ſublime or more affecting. What other poem preſents to us characters drawn with greater ſtrength and dignity, and without offence to hiſtori-

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cal fact? What other contains morality more pure, humanity more enlightened, or is more free from the errors of prejudice and vulgar paſſion? Whether the poet cauſes his characters to act or ſpeak, whether he paints the crimes of fanaticiſm, or the charms and the dangers of love, whether he tranſports his hearer to the field of battle, or into that heaven which he himſelf created, he is every where a philoſopher, and is every where deeply intent on promoting the true intereſts of the human race. In the very palace of fiction, we behold truth ſublimely riſe, and always painted in the moſt ſplendid and pureſt colours.

Of all epic poems, the Henriade alone has a moral purport; not that it can be ſaid to be the devellopement of one ſingle truth, which is a pedantic idea and to which a poet cannot ſubject himſelf, but becauſe it breathes throughout a deteſtation of war and fanaticiſm, and a ſpirit of toleration and humanity. Each poem neceſſarily wears the complexion of the age in which it took birth; and the birth of the Henriade was in the age of reaſon. Hence, the greater the progreſs of reaſon among mankind the greater will be their admiration of this poem.

The Henriade may be compared to the Æneid: both bear the ſtamp of genius in whatever depended on the poet, and the defects of both are in the choice of the ſubject, which was mutually dictated by a national ſpirit. Virgil, however, intended only to flatter Roman pride; but Voltaire had the more noble motive of preſerving the French from fanaticiſm, by a recapitulation of the crimes into which their anceſtors had been hurried.

The Henriade, Oedipus, and Mariamne had placed Voltaire much above his cotemporaries; and ſeemed to ſecure a life of fame, when his repoſe was troubled

troubled by a fatal accident. He had returned a satirical answer to some contemptuous words which had been spoken by a courtier, who revenged himself by causing Voltaire to be insulted by his servants without endangering his personal safety. The outrage was committed at the gate of the Hotel de Sully, where he had dined; nor did the Duke de Sully deign to shew any resentment; being, no doubt, persuaded that the descendants of the Franks had preserved the right of life and death over the Gauls. Justice remained mute; the parliament of Paris, which had caused far less misdemeanours to be punished when committed against one of its own subalterns,

ſubalterns, imagined nothing was due to an undignified citizen, although the greateſt man of literature the nation poſ-ſeſſed, and kept ſilence.

Voltaire was deſirous of taking thoſe means to revenge offended honour which the manners of modern nations have authoriſed, but which their laws have proſcribed. The Baſtile, and, at the end of ſix months, an order to quit Paris were the puniſhment of his firſt ſtep. The Cardinal de Fleury had not ſo much policy as even to denote the ſlighteſt mark of diſſatisfaction againſt the aggreſſor. Thus when men are unprotected by the laws they are puniſhed by

arbitrary

arbitrary power for ſeeking that revenge, which the want of protection renders legal, and which is preſcribed as neceſſary to the principles of honour. We venture to believe that the rights of man will be more reſpected in our times, that the laws will not remain impotent from any ridiculous prejudice of birth, and that when any quarrel ſhall happen between two citizens no miniſter will deprive him who received the firſt offence of his freedom.

Voltaire made a ſecret journey to Paris, but to no effect. He there met with more than one adverſary, who diſpoſed at pleaſure of judicial power

and

and minifterial authority, and who could fafely effect his ruin. He buried himfelf in retirement, and difdained longer to feek revenge; or, rather, revenged himfelf by overwhelming his enemy with the weight of his increafing fame, and forcing him to hear the name which he wifhed to degrade inceffantly repeated with acclamation throughout all Europe.

England was his place of refuge. Newton was no more; but his fpirit was infufed into his countrymen, whom he had taught to truft to experiment, and calculation only in the ftudy of nature. Locke, whofe death was likewife recent, had

had been the firft to give the theory of the human underftanding founded on experience, and to fhew the path which may fafely be followed in metaphyfical purfuits. The philofophy of Shaftefbury, commented on by Bolingbroke, and embellifhed by the verfication of Pope, had given birth in England to that deifm which announced morality, founded on motives fuch as might affect great minds without offence to reafon.

In France, mean time, the men of moft underftanding were labouring to fubftitute in our fchools the hypothefis of Des Cartes, for the abfurdities of fcholaftick philofophy. Any thefis, in which

either

either the ſyſtem of Copernicus or that of the Vortices was maintained, was a victory over prejudice. Innate ideas, in the eyes of the devout, were become almoſt an article of faith; though they had at firſt been ſuppoſed heretical. Malebranche, whom men imagined they underſtood, was the philoſopher in faſhion. He was ſuppoſed a free-thinker, who allowed himſelf to regard the exiſtence of the five propoſitions, in the unintelligible Book of Janſenius, as a thing in which the happineſs of the human race was not concerned, or who had the temerity to read Bayle without the permiſſion of a doctor in divinity.

This

This contraſt could not but excite the enthuſiaſm of a man, who, like Voltaire, had from his infancy ſhaken off prejudice. The example of England ſhewed him that truth was not formed to remain in ſecret among a few philoſophers, and men of the world, the pupils of theſe philoſophers; who laughed with them at thoſe errors of which the people are the victims, but became themſelves the defenders of error, when their office or their rank made it their intereſt, ſuppoſed or real, and were ready to proſcribe or even to perſecute their preceptors ſhould they venture to ſpeak what they themſelves privately believed.

From

From this moment, Voltaire felt himſelf called to be the deſtroyer of prejudice of every kind, of which his country was the ſlave. He felt the poſſibility of ſucceeding by a happy mixture of boldneſs and pliability, by knowing when to recede and when to advance, by artfully and alternately employing reaſon, ridicule, the charms of poetry, and theatrical effect, and by ſimplifying truth ſo as to render it popular, amiable, and faſhionable, without offence to frivolity. This good project, of rendering himſelf, by the force of his own genius, the benefactor of a whole nation, whence he meant to baniſh error, fired the mind of Voltaire, and inſpired him with forti-

tude. He ſwore to this to conſecrate his life; and he kept his vow.

The tragedy of Brutus was the firſt fruits of his journey to England.

The French theatre had not, ſince Cinna, breathed the haughty accents of freedom; and they had, there, been ſmothered by thoſe of revenge. In Brutus, the ſtrength of Corneille was diſcovered with additional pomp and ſplendor, combined with that ſimplicity which Corneille wanted, and the uniform elegance of Racine. Never were the rights of an oppreſſed people diſ-

played

played with greater power, eloquence, and even precifion, than in the fecond fcene of Brutus. The fifth act is equally remarkable for its pathos. The poet has been reproached for having made love a part of a fubject fo awful and terrible, and particularly love, which is deficient in intereft; but, had the motive of Titus been any other than love, he would have been debafed, the feverity of Brutus would not then have rent the hearts of the fpectators; and, had love been rendered too pathetic, it would have been to be feared that love would have deftroyed the caufe of liberty. It was after this piece had been acted that Fontenelle told Voltaire "He did not

 think

think his genius proper for tragedy, and that his ſtyle was too bold, pompous, and ſplendid."—" If ſo," replied Voltaire, " I will go and read your paſtorals."

He ſuppoſed, at this time, he might aſpire to a place in the French academy; and he might well have been thought modeſt to have waited ſo long. But he had not ſo much as the honour of dividing the votes of the academicians. The fat De Boſe pronounced in a dictatorial tone, that Voltaire ſhould never be one of their dignified members.

This De Boſe, whoſe name is now forgotten, was one of theſe men, who,

with little mind, and not too much knowledge, obtain admiſſion among men of rank and power, and ſucceed preciſely becauſe they neither have the wit to inſpire fear, nor to humble the ſelf-love of thoſe who ſeek the reputation of patroniſing men of letters. De Boſe was become a perſon of importance. He exerciſed the office of inſpector of new publications; which is an uſurpation on the part of the magiſtrate, over men of letters, to whom the avidity of the rich and the powerful have left no employments but thoſe whoſe execution requires the exertion of knowledge and talents.

After Brutus, Voltaire wrote the death of Cæſar; a ſubject which had previouſly been choſen by Shakſpere, ſome ſcenes of whom he imitated and *embelliſhed. The tragedy was not* played till ſeveral years had elapſed, and then in a college; he durſt not riſk a piece on the ſtage, deſtitute of love and of women, and which was likewiſe a tragedy in three acts: for it is not the moſt trifling innovations which excite the leaſt clamour among the enemies of novelty; little things neceſſarily impreſs themſelves on little minds. Still, however, a bold, noble, and figurative, yet natural, ſtyle, ſentiments worthy of the conqueror of the freeſt

freeſt people on earth, and that force and grandeur of character, and deep thought which pervade the language of theſe laſt Romans, could not but be felt by ſpectators capable of diſcovering ſuch merit, and men whoſe hearts and minds were related to theſe great perſonages, as well as by thoſe who might love hiſtory, and ſuch young minds as in the courſe of education had lately been occupied by ſimilar objects.

Hiſtorical tragedies, ſuch as Cinna, the death of Pompey, Brutus, Rome Preſerved, and the Triumvirate, of Voltaire, cannot be equally intereſting with the Cid, Iphigene, Zaïre, or Merope.

The mild and tender paſſions cannot diſplay themſelves in conformity with hiſtorical fact; incidents cannot be ſo ſelected and diſpoſed as to produce theatrical effect with equal ſucceſs; the poet has not the ſame power over the characters; the general intereſt, which is that of a people, or of a ſtate rather than of an individual, is rendered leſs forcible, becauſe it is dependent on ſentiments leſs energetic.

But, far from ſtigmatiſing this ſpecies of writing, as the coldeſt and moſt unfavourable to dramatic genius, it ought to be encouraged; becauſe it opens a vaſt field for the poet, in which he may unfold

unfold all the ſublime truths of politics; becauſe it diſplays grand hiſtorical pictures; and becauſe, by theſe means, the ſoul may moſt effectually be formed and elevated. We, doubtleſs, ought to place theſe among the firſt of poems which, like Mahomet and Alzire, are at once extenſive, and abounding with pathos and terror. But theſe are uncommon ſubjects, and require the exertion of talents, which no poet but Voltaire has hitherto poſſeſſed.

The Death of Cæſar was not allowed to be printed: the republican ſentiments it contained were attributed as crimes to the author. This was a ridiculous imputation;

tation; each character ſpoke his own language; and Brutus was not more the hero than Cæſar; the poet, treating an hiſtorical ſubject, drew his portraits after hiſtory, with ſtrict impartiality. But, under the government of the Cardinal de Fleury, which was at once tyrannical and puſillanimous, the language of ſlavery alone could appear to be innocent.

Who could, at preſent, ſuppoſe that the eulogy on the death of Mademoiſelle le Couvreur could have been made a ſubject of ſerious perſecution, and have obliged Voltaire to quit the metropolis, where he knew that abſence would fortunately

tunately cauſe all things to be forgotten, and even the frenzy of perſecution?

The theatre is truly a uſeful inſtitution, at which even indolent and frivolous youth preſerve ſomething of the habit of feeling and of thinking, while moral ideas are not totally loſt to their minds, and the pleaſures of the imagination are ſtill felt to exiſt. The ſenſations which the repreſentation of a tragedy excite purify the ſoul, and raiſe it from that apathy and egotiſm which are the maladies to which the diſſipated are, in the nature of things, condemned. Such exhibitions form a kind of connection between the two claſſes of men who do, and

could not pardon him for having proclaimed their unworthy cowardice.

Voltaire felt that ſome great theatrical ſucceſs could alone ſecure him the hearts of the public, and ſhield him from the attacks of fanaticiſm. In a country in which no popular power exiſts, each claſs has ſome point at which to railly and forms itſelf into a ſpecies of power. A dramatic author is under the protection of thoſe ſocieties who reſort to the theatre for amuſement. The public, by applauding alluſions, flatter or offend the vanity of men in office, diſcourage or re-animate their opponents, and cannot for this reaſon be openly

defied

defied. Voltaire, therefore, prefented his Euriphile, which did not effect his purpofe; but, far from being difcouraged by want of fuccefs, and delighted with the fubject of Zaïre, he finifhed that tragedy in eighteen days, and it made its appearance on the ftage four months after Euriphile.

Its fuccefs furpaffed his hopes. This was the firft piece in which, forfaking the tract of Corneille and Racine, he difcovered art, ftyle, and talents entirely his own. Never did love more true or more impaffioned draw tears more fweet; never did poet before fo depict the fury of jealoufy in a mind fo fimple,

ſo affectionate, and ſo generous. We love Orofmanes at the very moment he makes us ſhudder. He ſacrifices Zaïre, the affecting, the lovely, the virtuous Zaïre, yet we cannot hate him. And even, were it poſſible to forget Oroſmanes and Zaïre, how awful is irreligion in the perſon of the aged Luſignan? How noble is the ſpirit of fanaticiſm, which the reproaches of Nareſtam breathe? With what art has the poet painted the Chriſtians whoſe interference diſturb ſo ſweet a union, a feeling and pious woman who has ſacrificed her life and her love to her God, while the man who believes not in Chriſtianity weeps for Zaïre, whoſe mind is diſtracted by

filial

filial affection, and who is the willing victim of a superstitious prejudice which forbids her to love a man of a different sect. This is the master-piece of art. Whoever does not believe in the Old Testament, discovers in Athalia nothing but the school of bigotry, falsehood, and murder; but to all sects, and in all countries, Zaïre is the tragedy of the feeling and the innocent heart.

This tragedy was followed by that of Adelaide de Guesclin, which had likewise love for its subject, and in which, as in Zaïre, French heroes and French history were recited in beauti-

ful poetry, ſo as to increaſe the intereſt. But it was the patriotiſm of a citizen who delighted in the recollection of reſpected names and great events, and not the *patriotiſm of the anti-chamber* which has ſince been ſo applauded on the French theatre.

Adelaide failed of ſucceſs. A wit, when Mariamne was acting, prevented it being heard to the end by calling from the pit, *The queen drinks.* Another occaſioned Adelaide to be condemned by anſwering *Couſſi, couſſi**, to the noble and affecting queſtion of Vendome, *Es tu content Couci*†?

* So, ſo. † Art thou ſatisfied, Couci?

This

This ſame piece was again acted under the title of the Duke de Foix, after having been corrected, not in conformity to the judgment of the author but of his critics, and was more ſucceſsful. But when, long after, the philoſopher's three blows of the hammer had unknowingly taught the audience not to hiſs when the canon was fired* in Adelaide, at a time when the play was again acted in deſpight of Voltaire, who had leſs recollection of the beauties of his piece than of the wounds which criti-

* The text is, *Lorſque les trois coups de marteau du philoſophe, ſans le ſavoir, eurent appris qu'on ne ſifflerait plus le coup de canon d'Adelaide, &c.* The tranſlator imagines there is an alluſion here to ſome (perhaps well known) paſſage or incident, of which he thinks it his duty ingenuouſly to confeſs his ignorance.

cifm had inflicted, it met with the moft unbounded applaufe. The character of Vendome, as amorous as that of Orofmanes, was then felt in all its force. The one, jealous in confequence of an imperious temper, the other, from an excefs of love; the firft, tyrannical from native impetuofity and pride, and the fecond, from the unfortunate habits attending on defpotic power. Tender and difinterefted in his affection, Orofmanes renders himfelf guilty during that momentary frenzy into which he is hurried by excufable error, and punifhes by facrifing himfelf. Vendome, more perfonal and rather the flave of his paffion than of his miftrefs, protects

protects his crime with a more tranquil fury, but expiates it by his remorſe and the ſacrifice of his love. The one exhibits thoſe exceſſes and ſufferings into which the violence of deſpair plunges the generous ſoul; and the other, the power of repentant virtue over the ſtrong mind, which had previouſly abandoned itſelf to paſſion.

It is ſaid that the ſucceſs of Adelaide was injured by the Temple of Taſte, in which charming work Voltaire had paſſed ſentence on the writers of the paſt age, and even on ſome of his cotemporaries. Time has confirmed all his deciſions, which each then appeared

ſacrilegious. In obſerving ſuch literary intolerance, the neceſſity, under which every writer labours who wiſhes to live in peace, of reſpecting opinions already formed of the merit of an orator or a poet, and the fury with which the public purſues thoſe who dare even on the moſt indifferent ſubjects to think differently from themſelves, we ſhould be tempted to imagine that man is intolerant by Nature. Wit, reaſon, and genius cannot always guard us againſt this misfortune. There are few men who have not ſome ſecret idols, the worſhip of which they cannot calmly ſee deſtroyed,

Pride

Pride and envy is frequently the origin of this ſenſation. The writer who, criticiſing thoſe whom we admire, aſſumes an air of ſuperiority over them and conſequently over ourſelves, we regard as one that affects an offenſive pre-eminence. We fear, while pulling down the ſtatue of the man who is no more, he means to ſubſtitute that of a living favourite, whoſe fame fails not to afflict mediocrity. But when ſtrong minds yield to this kind of intolerance, this temporary and excuſable weakneſs, the offspring of indolence and habit, they ſoon again cede to the force of truth, and are neither guilty of injuſtice nor perſecution.

Voltaire had, in his retirement, conceived the happy plan of bringing his nation acquainted with the philoſophy, the literature, the opinions, and the ſects of England; to effect which, he wrote his Letters on the Engliſh Nation. Newton whoſe philoſophic opinions, whoſe ſyſtem of the earth, and whoſe optical experiments were ſcarcely known in France; Locke whoſe Eſſay on the Human Underſtanding; tranſlated into French, had only been read by a few philoſophers; Bacon the extent of whoſe fame was that he had been lord chancelor; Shakſpere whoſe genius and groſs errors form a phœnomenon in the hiſtory of literature; Congreve,

Congreve, Wicherly, Addiſon, and Pope whoſe names were almoſt unknown even by our men of letters; the bigotted Quakers who, without being perſecutors, were fanaticks in their devotion, yet the moſt rational of Chriſtians in their creed and in their morals, ridiculous in the eyes of the world, for having carried two virtues to exceſs; the love of peace and the love of equality; the other ſects by which England was divided; the influence which a general ſpirit of freedom had there obtained over literature, philoſophy, arts, opinions, and manners; and the practice of inoculation which had been examined without prejudice and met with

with few impediments, notwithſtanding the ſingularity and the innovation of the practice: ſuch were the principal ſubjects of his work.

Fontenelle was the firſt who made reaſon and philoſophy ſpeak an agreeable and inviting language: he had the art to mingle reflexions, ſage, delicate, and frequently profound, with the ſciences. In the Letters of Voltaire we diſcover the merit of Fontenelle, with more taſte, ſimplicity, boldneſs, and gaiety. No rooted attachment to the errors of Des Cartes interfered, to ſpread a ſhade over, and to disfigure, truth. He poſſeſſed the logic

gic and pleaſantry of the *Lettres Provinciales* *, but exerciſed them on greater ſubjects; nor were they injured by a varniſh of monkiſh devotion.

This work was the æra of a revolution in France; it gave riſe to a taſte for philoſophy, and Engliſh literature; it intereſted us in the manners, policy, and commercial knowledge of that nation; and it brought us acquainted with the Engliſh language. A puerile partiality afterward took place of former indifference; and, by a remarkable ſingularity, Voltaire had the glory of combating it, and of diminiſhing its

* By Paſcal.

influence.

influence. He had taught us to feel the merit of Shakſpere, and to regard his works as a mine, whence treaſures might be dug by our poets; and, when a ridiculous enthuſiaſm preſented this eloquent, but wild and capricious poet, as a model to a nation poſſeſſed of Racine and Voltaire, and wiſhed us to conſider his canvaſs, overcharged with abſurdity and groſs caricature, as the energetic and true pictures of nature, Voltaire defended the cauſe of taſte and reaſon. He had firſt exclaimed againſt the too great timidity of our theatre, and was afterward obliged to exclaim againſt our inclination to imi-

tate

tate the licentious barbarity of the Engliſh ſtage.

The publication of theſe letters excited perſecution, the bitterneſs of which, to read them at preſent, could ſcarcely be conceived: but innate ideas were oppoſed in them, and our doctors of that day believed, if there were no innate ideas, there would be no ſufficiently marked characters to diſtinguiſh between the ſouls of men and of brutes. Beſide, it was there maintained, after Locke, that there was no ſtrict proof that God had not the power, if he had the will, to impart to matter the faculty of thinking. This was to infringe

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on the privilege of the divines, who pretended to know accurately and exactly, they and they alone, all that God has thought, and all that he could do, or has done, fince, and even before, the beginning of the world.

In fine, Voltaire criticifed fome paffages of the Thoughts of Pafcal: a work which the Jefuits, in their own defpite, were obliged to refpect as much as the works of St. Auguftin. It gave fcandalous offence to fee a poet, nay more a layman, dare to fit in judgment on Pafcal. It appeared to be an attack on the only defender of the Chriftian religion, who, among the fafhionable world,

world had the reputation of being a great man. It was to attack religion itſelf: and how much would the proofs of religion be weakened, ſhould the mathematician, Paſcal, who had openly devoted himſelf to its defence, be convicted of having often reaſoned ill.

The clergy demanded that the Letters on the Engliſh Nation ſhould be ſuppreſſed; and they were ſo, by an arret of council. Theſe arrets were given, without examination, as a kind of retribution, for the ſubſidy which government obtained from the aſſemblies of the clergy; and as a reward for the facility with which they were granted.

granted. Miniſters forgot that the intereſt of the ſecular power was not to ſupport, but to ſuffer the progreſs of reaſon to deſtroy, that empire of the prieſthood which has been ſo long and ſo barbarouſly abuſed; and that it is not good policy to purchaſe peace of an enemy, by ſacrificing our defenders.

The parliament burnt the book, according to a cuſtom formerly invented by Tiberius, and rendered ridiculous ſince the invention of printing. But there are certain people for whom the experience of three ages are neceſſary, before they can begin to perceive abſurdity.

So much perſecution, exerciſed at the very time when the miracles of the Abbé Paris and thoſe of Father Girard were acting, loaded the two perſecuting parties with ridicule and opprobrium. It was natural that they ſhould unite, againſt a man who daringly preached reaſon; and they went ſo far as to order informations to be iſſued againſt the author of the Letters. The keeper of the ſeals baniſhed Voltaire, who, being at that time abſent, received early information, and avoided the people ſent to conduct him to the place of his exile; rather chooſing to combat at a diſtance, and where he could be in ſafety. His friends proved that he had

not forfeited his promiſe, not to publiſh his Letters in France; and that they had made their appearance from the treachery of a book-binder. Fortunately, the keeper of the ſeals had more zeal for his authority than for religion, and was much more of a miniſter than of a devotee. The ſtorm was huſhed, and Voltaire had permiſſion to return to Paris.

This calm was but of momentary duration. The epiſtle to Urania, which, till then, had been kept in ſecret, was printed; and Voltaire, to eſcape a new perſecution, was obliged to diſavow and attribute it to the Abbé de

de Chaulieu, who had been dead ſeveral years. The imputation did the abbé honour as a poet, without injuring his fame as a Chriſtian.

The neceſſity of falſehood, in diſavowing a work, is an act of extremity, alike repugnant to conſcience and to dignity of character; but the crime is in the injuſtice of thoſe men who render ſuch a diſavowal neceſſary for the ſafety of the author. If that which is in itſelf innocent be made a crime, if abſurd or arbitrary laws have infringed on the natural right, which all men poſſeſs, of not only having but publiſhing their opinions, we then deſervedly

lose the other right of always hearing the truth, which is solely founded on freedom. We are forbidden to deceive, because to deceive any man is to commit an injury on him, or to expose him to commit one himself. But injury supposes a right; and no one has the right to seek for and secure to himself the means of doing injustice.

We do not disculpate Voltaire, for having attributed his work to the Abbé de Chaulieu, but such an imputation is in itself indifferent, and a mere act of pleasantry; it is affording an excuse to people in power who are disposed to be indulgent without daring to confess

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themſelves ſo, by the aid of which they may repel ſuch perſecutors as are over ſerious in their zeal.

The indiſcretion with which ſome of the friends of Voltaire repeated fragments from his Maid of Orleans was the cauſe of a new perſecution. The keeper of the ſeals threatened to confine the poet in the worſt and deepeſt of dungeons, if any part of the poem made its appearance. Remembering the long ſpace of time during which ſuch ſubaltern tyrants, inflated by momomentary power, have dared to hold ſimilar language to men who have been the glory of their country and

 their

their age, the ſenſations of contempt riſe in us and ſmother thoſe of indignation. The oppreſſor and the oppreſſed are now both in the grave; but the name of the oppreſſed will be borne, on the wings of fame, to future ages, and ſingly preſerved from oblivion; while eternal ſhame will purſue the memory of his cowardly perſecutors.

It was in theſe tempeſtuous times that the lieutenant of the police, Herault, one day ſaid to Voltaire:—— "Write what you will, you never can overturn the Chriſtian religion."——

"We

"We ſhall ſee that,"——replied the poet*.

At a time when there was much converſation concerning a man who had been arreſted by a ſuppoſed forged lettre de cachet, Voltaire aſked the ſame magiſtrate what puniſhment would be inflicted on thoſe who ſhould fabricate falſe lettres de cachet.—"They will be hanged."—"That will be but doing right: let us hope the time will come when thoſe who ſign the true will be ſerved in the ſame way."

* See, in the general correſpondence of D'Alembert, the letter of the 20th of June, 1760.

Wearied by fo much perfecution, Voltaire thought it neceffary to change his mode of life, to effect which fortune fecured him the means. Ancient philofophers have vaunted of poverty as the fafe-gaurd of independence: Voltaire, that he might be independent, wifhed to become rich; and he was equally to be commended. The ancients were unacquainted with that fecret wealth which may at once be difperfed and fecured, in various countries, beyond the reach of power. Confifcation and its abufes amongft them rendered wealth as dangerous as fame, or popular favour. The extent of the Roman empire, and the fmall-

nefs

neſs of the Grecian republics, alike prevented men from the concealment of their riches, or their perſons. The difference of manners among neighbouring nations, the almoſt general ignorance of foreign languages, and a leſs degree of intercourſe throughout the world, were then ſo many impediments to a change of country.

The ancients likewiſe knew leſs of the conveniencies of life, which among us are become neceſſary to all who are not born in poverty. Their climate ſubjected them to leſs numerous real wants; and the wealthy were more addicted to magnificence, refinement in debauchery,

debauchery, excefs, and caprice, than to habitual and daily convenience. Thus, as it was more eafy for them to be poor, and more difficult to be rich without danger, riches were not among them, as among us, the means of efcaping from unjuft oppreffion.

Let us not blame a philofopher for having, in order to fecure his independence, preferred fuch refources as the manners of his age fupplied to thofe which belong to other manners and to other times.

The fortune which defcended to Voltaire from his father and his bro-

ther was ample, and had been increafed by the London edition of the Henriade, and fortunate fpeculations in the public funds. Thus, to the advantage of poffeffing wealth, which afcertained independence, he added that of being indebted for it to himfelf. The ufe he made of riches might prevail on envy itfelf to pardon him their acquirement.

Much of his wealth was expended in aiding men of letters, and in encouraging fuch youth as he thought difcovered the feeds of genius. This, in particular, was the application he made of the trifling profits he derived from

from his works and his theatrical productions, when he did not make a free gift of the latter to the comedians. Yet never was author more cruelly accused of injuries done to his booksellers; but the whole swarm of literary insects were at their command, and were themselves anxious to decry the conduct of a man whose works they were conscious they could not bring into disrepute. The pride of mediocrity, the vanity of men, even of merit, wounded by a too incontestible superiority, the busy world ever anxious to degrade knowledge and talents which are the objects of their secret envy, and fanaticks who were interested to calum-

calumniate Voltaire, that they might have the leſs to fear, all conſpired to increaſe the detraction of bookſellers and hyper-critics. But proofs of the falſhood of theſe imputations, as well as the favours heaped by Voltaire on ſome of his detractors, ſtill ſubſiſt; nor can we remember theſe proofs without a ſigh, at the misfortune of genius thus condemned to ſuffer, and at that ſhameful facility men have to credit whatever can relieve them from the neceſſity of admiring. Such ſighs are the melancholy retribution of fame.

Having no more need, for the ſecurity of his fortune, to court patronage, ſolicit

ſolicit places, or to trafic with bookſellers, Voltaire renounced all reſidence at the capital. Previous to the adminiſtration of Cardinal de Fleury, and his journey to England, his intercourſe had been among people of the firſt faſhion. Princes and nobles, thoſe who were at the head of affairs, people of faſhion and women moſt in vogue, were courted by him and were equally deſirous of his company. He was every where received with pleaſure and welcome, but he every where inſpired envy and fear. Superior, in genius, he was even more ſo, in the wit of converſation, into which he infuſed whatever can render frivolity amiable,

amiable, and at the ſame time interſperſed traits of a more elevated nature. Born with the talent of humour, his repartees were often repeated; nor was there any want of an application of the word malignant to what was no more than the deciſion of the underſtanding, rendered acute by native wit.

On his return from England, he felt that in ſociety, where men aſſemble from motives of vanity and ſelf-love, he ſhould meet but with few friends. He therefore, though he did not quarrel with ſuch ſocieties, frequented them leſs. The taſte he had acquired for magnificence, grandeur, and whatever

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is uncommon and ſplendid had become habitual, and he preſerved it even in retirement. By this taſte his works were often embelliſhed, and it occaſionally influenced his judgment. On his return to his country, he confined himſelf to live familiarly with only a few friends. He had loſt M. de Génonville and M. de Maiſons, whoſe death he lamented in ſuch affecting verſe, which remains a monument of that true and deep ſenſibility which nature had beſtowed, and genius diſſeminated through his works, and which was the fortunate origin of his ardent zeal for the happineſs of mankind, which was the ſublime and continued

tinued paſſion of his old age. He ſtill poſſeſſed M. d'Argental, who, during his long life, preſerved ſenſations of affection and admiration for Voltaire, and who was rewarded by his friendſhip and his confidence. Madame Forment and Madame Cideville were likewiſe his friends, and the confidants of his works and his projects.

But about the time when he ſuffered ſuch various perſecution, friendſhip, ſtill more tender, afforded him conſolation and increaſed his love of retirement. The Marchioneſs du Chatelet was, like him, paſſionately enamoured of ſtudy and fame, as well as of philo-

ſophy; but it was of that kind of philoſophy which ſprings up in the ſtrong and free mind. She had ſtudied metaphyſicks and geometry ſufficiently to analize Leibnitz, and tranſlate Newton. She cultivated the arts; but not undiſtinguiſhingly, nor ſo as to prefer them to the knowledge of nature and man. Superior to prejudice, as well from ſtrength of character as from reaſon, ſhe had not the weakneſs to conceal how much prejudice was deſpiſed by her. Indulging in the trifling amuſements of her ſex, rank, and age, ſhe yet could contemn and abandon them without regret in favour of retirement, labour, and friendſhip. Her ſuperiority

ſuperiority excited the jealouſy of women and even of moſt of the men, with whom ſhe neceſſarily aſſociated. Yet ſhe could pardon their envy without an effort. Such was the friend that Voltaire ſelected with whom to paſs his days; days which were ever conſecrated to works of genius, and embelliſhed by mutual friendſhip.

Weary of literary diſputes, diſguſted to ſee the league which inferior writers had formed againſt him, and who were ſecretly ſupported by men whoſe merit ſhould have preſerved them from ſuch unworthy aſſociates, finding likewiſe that ſince he had dared to ſpeak truth

his accuſers were as numerous as his critics, and perceiving that they inceſſantly armed religion and government againſt him becauſe he was a good poet, he ſought employment more peaceful in the ſtudy of the ſciences.

He determined to publiſh an elementary Treatiſe of the Diſcoveries of Newton, relative to the ſyſtem of the earth and of light, that he might render them familiar to all who had the ſlighteſt knowledge of mathematics; and that he might make known, at the ſame time, the philoſophic opinions of Newton, and his ideas of ancient chronology.

At

At the time that theſe Elements appeared, the Carteſian ſyſtem prevailed even in the Academy of Sciences, at Paris. A few young geometricians only had the courage to forſake it; nor did any work exiſt in the French language from which an idea could be formed of the grand diſcoveries which had, for half a century, been rendered public in England.

The author, however, was refuſed a privilege for publication. The Chancellor d'Agueſſeau was a Carteſian in his youth, becauſe the ſyſtem was then faſhionable among ſuch as pique themſelves on riſing ſuperior to vulgar pre-

judice; and, to theſe his philoſophical opinions, were added his political and religious ſentiments againſt Newton. He diſcovered that a chancellor of France ought not to ſuffer an Engliſh philoſopher, who ſcarcely was a Chriſtian, to riſe victorious over a ſuppoſed orthodox Frenchman. D' Ageuſſeau had a prodigious memory, and continued ſtudy had rendered him deeply learned in various ſpecies of erudition; but his mind, wearied by being made the receptacle of the opinions of the others, had neither ſtrength ſufficient to combine his own ideas, nor to form fixt and definite principles. His ſuperſtition, his timidity, his reſpect for an-

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cient cuſtoms, and his want of reſolution, narrowed his views relative to a reformation of the laws and impeded his activity. He died, after having been long a miniſter, and left France to regret that his great virtues had ſlumbered in inutility, and that his rare qualities had been loſt to the world.

His ſeverity reſpecting the Elements of the Newtonian Philoſophy was not the only mark of littleneſs he ſhewed during his cenſorſhip of the preſs. He would not give privileges for the printing of novels; nor would he ſuffer the novel of Cleveland to be publiſhed,

but on condition that the hero ſhould change his religion.

Voltaire, at the ſame time, purſued the ſtudy of experimental philoſophy, ſent queries of every kind to the learned, and repeated their experiments, or made new ones in their ſtead.

He was a candidate for the prize, given by the Academy of Sciences, on the nature and propagation of fire; and aſſumed the following motto, which, for preciſion and energy, is not unworthy of the author of the Henriade:

Ignis ubique latet naturam amplectitur omnem,
Cuncta parit, renovat, dividit, unit, alit.

The prize was given to the illuſtrious Euler, by whom, in ſcientific conteſt, no man need bluſh at being vanquiſhed. Madame du Chatelet, as well as her friend, was likewiſe a candidate, and both pieces were mentioned in very honourable terms.

The diſpute on the meaſure of forces at that time occupied mathematicians. Voltaire, in a memorial preſented to and approved by the Academy, took the part of Des Cartes and Newton againſt Leibnitz and the two Bernouilli's; nay even againſt Madame du Chatelet, who was become the partiſan of Leibnitz.

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We are far from pretending that theſe works are any addition to the fame of Voltaire, or even that they deſerve a place among the learned, but the merit of having made the French, who are not mathematicians, acquainted with Newton, the true ſyſtem of the earth, and the principal phœnomena of optics, deſerves notice in the life of a philoſopher.

It is good to diſſeminate truth relative to objects of ſcience, whether it relate to the great laws of nature and the order of the world, or to thoſe common facts which fall under every man's obſervation. Abſolute ignorance

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is ever accompanied by error; and error in phyſics often is the ſupport of prejudices of a more dangerous kind. The philoſophic knowledge of Voltaire was further uſeful to him as a poet; we do not, here, entirely refer to thoſe pieces in which he had the rare merit of expreſſing truth in verſe with preciſion without disfiguring it, or ceaſing to be a poet, or of addreſſing the imagination while he delighted the ear. The ſtudy of the ſciences enlarges the ſphere of poetic ideas, and enriches verſe with new images. Without this reſource, poetry, neceſſarily limitted by too confined a circle, would be no more than the art of re-producing,

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in harmonious language, common thoughts and exhaufted pictures.

Be the fubject what it may, he who poffeffes extenfive and profound knowledge will ever poffefs an immenfe advantage. The poetic genius of Voltaire would have been the fame, but he would not have been fo great a poet, had he not ftudied philofophy and hiftory. Nor is it folely in augmenting the number of our ideas that fuch extraneous ftudies are ufeful; they add to the perfection of the mind, by exercifing its various faculties in a more equal manner.

After

After having applied ſome years to experimental philoſophy, Voltaire conſulted Clairaut relative to his progreſs, who had the frankneſs to anſwer that after obſtinate labour he would never ariſe above mediocrity in the ſciences, and that he would vainly loſe that time which fame required he ſhould dedicate to poetry and ethics. Voltaire liſtened patiently and yielded to that natural inclination which inceſſantly led him to the Belles Lettres and to the wiſhes of his friends, who were unable to accompany him in his new career.

He was not therefore entirely abſorbed in the ſciences during his reſi-

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dence at Cirey. He there wrote Alzire, Zulime, Mahomet, the Hiſtory of Charles XII. finiſhed his Diſcourſes on Man, prepared the Age of Louis XIV. and collected materials for his Eſſay on the Manners and Spirit of Nations, from Charlemagne to the preſent age.

Alzire and Mahomet are immortal monuments of the height to which the human genius, poetry, and philoſophy can raiſe the tragic art. This art is not in theſe pieces confined to the pourtraying the paſſions, awakening their power over the ſoul, and making the ſweet tears of love and of pity flow; it becomes the tutor of mankind, whom it inclines to

virtue;

virtue; indolent citizens, who bring with them to the theatre the wearineſs of having ſpent a uſeleſs day, are there called on to diſcuſs the firſt grand intereſts of the human race.

In Alzire, we behold the noble but wild and impetuous virtues of the man of nature, combatting the vices of ſociety corrupted by fanaticiſm and ambition, and, ceding to virtue, made perfect by reaſon in the ſoul of Alzares, or in the dying and diſabuſed Guſman. Here, we at once are taught how ſociety corrupts man by making prejudice the ſubſtitute of ignorance, and how it improves

improves him when error is baniſhed by truth.

But the moſt fatal of prejudices is that of fanaticiſm. Voltaire was determined the monſter ſhould become the victim of the ſtage; and, that he might expel it from every heart, he employed theſe terrrible effects which tragedy alone can afford. It, no doubt, was eaſy to render a fanatic odious, but that this fanatic ſhould be a great man, and that, while abhorring, we ſhould of neceſſity admire him, that he ſhould deſcend to mean artifice without degradation, that, while occupied in propagating

gating a religion and raiſing an empire, he ſhould be in love without being ridiculous, that while committing every crime he ſhould not inſpire that painful horror which accompanies the acts of villains, that in the tone of a prophet he ſhould ſpeak the language of genius, that he ſhould be ſuperior to the bigottry with which he intoxicated his ignorant and intrepid diſciples yet be above the baſeneſs of hypocriſy, that his crimes ſhould be ſucceſsful, that he ſhould triumph, yet ſhould appear ſufficiently puniſhed by remorſe, all this could only be effected by the dramatic art, when employed by the true poet.

Mahomet was firſt acted at Liſle, in 1741. During the repreſentation, a letter from the king of Pruſſia was delivered to Voltaire, which informed him of the victory of Molwitz. He ſtopped the piece to read the letter to the auditors. You will ſee, ſaid he, to to his ſurrounding friends, this tragedy of Molwitz will make mine ſucceſsful. They ventured to play it at Paris; but the bigots, by their exclamations, availing themſelves of the weakneſs of the Cardinal de Fleury, prevailed on him to forbid the repreſentation. Voltaire thought proper to ſend it to Benedict XIV. with two Latin verſes for his portrait. The Pontiff, Lambertini, a

tolerant

tolerant and eaſy prince, but a man of much underſtanding, ſent him a kind anſwer, accompanied by ſome medals.

Crébillon was more ſcrupulous than the pope. He never would conſent that a piece ſhould be played, which, by proving that tragic terror may be increaſed to the utmoſt exceſs without ſacrificing the pathos or revolting the mind, was a ſatire on that ſpecies of writing, of which he proudly believed himſelf to be the creator and the model. It was not till the year 1751 that M. D'Alembert, being appointed by M. D'Argenſon to examine Mahomet, had the courage to approve it, and

thus to expofe himfelf to the mutual hatred of the men of letters leagued againft Voltaire, and of the devotees. His fortitude was the more deferving of refpect, becaufe the approver of a work does not participate in its fame, and becaufe he could find no recompenfe for the danger to which he expofed himfelf, except the pleafure of having ferved his friend, and aided the triumph of reafon.

Zulima failed of fuccefs; nor were the efforts of the author to correct and palliate its faults effectual. A tragedy is an experiment on the human heart, and an experiment which does

not always ſucceed, even in the moſt able hands. Zulima, however, is the firſt woman preſented on the ſtage, who, hurried by paſſion into criminal acts, ſtill preſerved all the generoſity and diſintereſtedneſs of love. This character, ſo natural, ſo violent, and ſo tender, might perhaps have deſerved indulgence from the audience; and the critics of the theatre, in favour of the new beauties of this part, might have pardoned the weakneſs of the others, which the author himſelf condemned with equal frankneſs and ſeverity.

The Diſcourſes on Man are one of the fineſt monuments of French poetry.

The plan of them may not be ſo regular as that of the Epiſtles of Pope, but they poſſeſs the advantage of philoſophy more true, mild, and general. All the variety of harmony, a kind of careleſſneſs, ſoothing ſenſibility, an enthuſiaſm ever noble and ever real, impart a charm to them, which alternately delights the mind, the imagination, and the heart; a charm, the uſe of which was known only to Voltaire, and which was that of pleaſing, moving, and inſtructing, without ever fatiguing the reader, and of writing to all underſtandings, and to all ages. Flaſhes of true philoſophy frequently break for[illegible] and are generally addreſſed

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ſo to the feelings or to the fancy as to appear natural, and to become popular. This talent is as beneficial and as rare as that of giving a profound appearance to falſe and trivial ideas is common and dangerous.

Quitting the company of Pope, we admire his genius, and the addreſs with which he defends his ſyſtem, but the ſoul is unmoved, and the mind preſently finds that its objections have rather been eluded than anſwered. But we cannot leave Voltaire without encouragement or conſolation; and, while we have a melancholly proſpect of the evils to which nature has con-

demned man, we are likewiſe acquainted with their antidotes..

The Life of Charles XII. was the firſt of the hiſtorical publications of Voltaire. The ſtyle, as rapid as the exploits of the hero, hurries on the reader to an uninterrupted train of ſplendid expeditions, ſingular anecdotes, and romantic events, which give curioſity and feeling no repoſe. The narrative is rarely interrupted by reflections. The author forgot himſelf that he might give place to his characters. He ſeems to relate what he has juſt heard concerning his hero. The ſingle ſubject is battles and military enterprize; yet, the ſpirit of a philoſopher

philoſopher and the ſoul of a defender of the human race are preſent every where.

Voltaire wrote from original memorials, furniſhed by thoſe who were witneſſes of the events; and his hiſtorical truth is warranted by the reſpectable teſtimony of Staniſlaus, the friend, the companion, and the victim of Charles XII.

The hiſtory was, notwithſtanding, accuſed of being a novel, becauſe it had all the intereſt of one. Though no man, perhaps, ever excited ſo much enthuſiaſm, neither was any man ever

treated

treated with lefs indulgence than Voltaire. As a reputation for wit is in France the thing moft envied, and as it was impoffible for his fuperiority in wit to remain unacknowledged, he was moft vehemently denied every other merit; and, the pretended claims to wit being as reftlefs in every clafs of mankind as in that of men of letters, the number of thofe who envied him was almoft equal to that of his readers.

In vain had Voltaire imagined that the retreat of Cirey would hide him from hatred; he had concealed his perfon only, his fame ftill offended his enemies. A libel, which was a malig-

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nant attack on his whole life, appeared to the diſturbance of his repoſe. He was treated like a prince, or a miniſter, becauſe he excited equal envy. The Abbé Desfontaines, who was indebted to Voltaire for liberty and perhaps for life, was the author of this libel. Accuſed of a ſhameful vice, which ſuperſtition has claſſed among crimes, he had been impriſoned at a time when, from attrocious and ridiculous policy, it was thought proper to burn a few men, in order to make another man conceive diſguſt for this vice, to which they falſely ſuppoſed him inclined.

Voltaire

Voltaire, being informed of the misfortune of the Abbé Desfontaines, who was perſonally unknown to him, and whoſe only recommendation was that he was a man of letters, haſtened to Fontainbleau in ſearch of Madame de Prie, then all puiſſant, from whom he obtained the priſoner's liberty, on condition that he ſhould not appear at Paris. Voltaire further procured him a place of retirement at the ſeat of a lady of his acquaintance. Here Deſfontaines wrote a libel againſt his benefactor; this he was obliged to throw into the fire, but he never could pardon Voltaire the act of ſaving his life. He eagerly took every opportunity the periodical

periodical publications afforded, of attacking him; and it was he who, by the mouth of a prieſt*, informed the world that Voltaire was the author of *Le Mondain*, an ingenious poem, the intent of which was to ſhew that luxury, by poliſhing man's manners and encouraging induſtry, obviates a part of thoſe ills which take birth in the inequality of, and inſenſibility attendant on, riches.

He was thus expoſed to the danger of new baniſhment, becauſe, to the reproach of having preached up pleaſure, a great one in the eyes of thoſe who

* *Prêtre de ſéminaire.*

need

need the cloak of austerity to conceal vice more real, was added the additional crime of having ridiculed the amusements of our first parents.

In fine, the journalists published the *Voltairomanie*; and then it was that Voltaire, who so long had silently suffered under the slanders of Desfontaines and Rousseau, abandoned himself to emotions of anger, of which his enemies were little worthy.

Not satisfied with avenging himself by delivering up his adversaries to public contempt, and imprinting on them marks which no time can efface, he

he profecuted Desfontaines who efcaped by difavowing the libel, and who immediately wrote others to confole himfelf for the misfortune. Thus, at the age of forty-four, after having been patient during twenty years, Voltaire, for the firft time, forgot that moderation which it were highly to be wifhed men of letters never fhould forget. Though they have received from nature the formidable gift of devoting their foes to ridicule and fhame, they ought to difdain the ufe of this dangerous weapon in avenging their own quarrels, and employ it only againft the perfecutors of truth, and the enemies of the rights of mankind.

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The friendſhip, which, about the ſame time was formed between Voltaire and the prince royal of Pruſſia, was one of the firſt cauſes of the exceſſive anger of his enemies. The young Frederic had received from his father the education of a ſoldier only, but nature formed him for a man of an amiable, extenſive, and elevated mind, as well as for a great general. He was ſent to Rhineſberg by his father, who, having conceived the project of beheading him as a deſerter becauſe he had attempted to travel without permiſſion, yielded to the remonſtrances of the imperial embaſſador, and ſatisfied himſelf with cauſing the prince to

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be preſent at the execution of one of his travelling companions.

In this ſtate of retirement, Frederic, who was enamoured with the French language, poetry, and philoſophy, choſe Voltaire for his confident and guide. They mutually ſent each other their works; the prince conſulted the philoſopher concerning his ſtudies, and requeſted leſſons and advice. They diſcuſſed the moſt curious as the moſt difficult metaphyſical queſtions. The prince, at that time, ſtudied the works of Wolf, whoſe ſyſtems and unintelligible language he ſoon abjured for philoſophy more ſimple and more true.

He also employed himſelf in a refutation of Machiavel; that is, in proving that the moſt certain policy of a ſovereign is to make moral rules his guide, and that his perſonal intereſt does not neceſſarily render him the enemy of his ſubjects and his neighbours, as Machiavel had ſuppoſed, either from a love of hypotheſis or to diſguſt his countrymen with a monarchial government, toward which they ſeemed to be inclined by their wearineſs of a republican ſyſtem ever tempeſtuous and often cruel.

In the preceding century, Tycho-Brahe, Des Cartes, and Leibnitz, had enjoyed the ſociety of monarchs, by whom

whom they had been loaded with marks of esteem; but confidence and freedom did not preside in this too unequal intercourse. Of these Frederic gave the first example, in which, unfortunately for his fame, he forgot to persist. He sent his friend, the Baron de Keyserling, to visit the *Deities* of Cirey, and to bear his portrait and manuscripts to Voltaire. The philosopher was moved, perhaps flattered, by this homage; but his greatest pleasure was the prospect of a prince destined to reign, who loved literature, and was the friend of philosophy and the foe of superstition. He hoped the author of the Anti-Machiavel would be a pacific

monarch, and he took ſerious delight in ſecretly printing the book which he believed muſt bind the prince to virtue from the fear of betraying his own principles, and of reading his condemnation in the work he himſelf had written.

When Frederic aſcended the throne, he teſtified no change, but remained the friend of Voltaire. The cares of government did not enfeeble his love of poetry, nor his avidity to poſſeſs the unpubliſhed writings of Voltaire, which were read by ſcarcely any except himſelf and Madame du Chatelet. Yet, one of his firſt ſteps was to ſuſpend the publication,

publication of the Anti-Machiavel. Voltaire obeyed, and the corrections which he had made with regret were rendered fruitlefs.

His defire that his difciple, now a king, fhould enter into a public engagement, which fhould fecure his adherence to philofophic maxims, was incieafed. He went to meet him at Wezel, and was aftonifhed to fee a young monarch in a uniform, on a camp-bed, fhivering with a fever. But his fever did not prevent him from profiting by his neighbourhood to the principality of Liege, and enforcing the payment of a forgotten debt, from

the bishop. Voltaire wrote the memorial, which was supported by the bayonet, and he returned to Paris well satisfied to have found his hero an amiable man. But he refused the offers of the king, who wished to draw him to Prussia, and preferred the friendship of Madame du Chatelet to the favour of a monarch whom he admired.

The king of Prussia declared war against the daughter of Charles VI. and took advantage of her weakness to render some old pretensions on Silesia valid. Two battles secured him the possession of the province. Cardinal de Fleury, who had undertaken the war in

in his own defpite, continued his fecret negotiations. The emprefs perceived her intereft was not to treat with France, againft whom fhe hoped for ufeful allies, who would themfelves fupport the burden of war; whereas, if fhe had none but the Pruffian monarch to combat, fhe muft be left to herfelf, and muft behold the wifhes and fecret aid of thofe very powers on the fide of her foe. She rather chofe therefore to ftifle her refentment, inform Frederic of the propofitions of the cardinal, induce him to make peace by this confidence, and purchafe by the facrifice of Silefia, the neutrality of the enemy whom fhe had moft to fear.

The war had not interrupted the correſpondence between the king and Voltaire. Frederic ſent poetry from the field, while preparing for battle, or amid the tumult of victory; and Voltaire, continuing to praiſe his military fame, never ceaſed to preach humanity and peace.

The Cardinal de Fleury died. Voltaire had been intimate with him, becauſe he was deſirous of learning the anecdotes of the reign of Louis XIV; and Fleury, who loved to relate them, dwelt on thoſe which regarded himſelf, not doubting that Voltaire would eagerly inſert them in his hiſtory.

But

But the hatred of Fleury, and of all feeble men, for one who rofe fuperior to common powers, was greater than his love of tafte, and even than his vanity.

Fleury endeavoured to impede freedom of fpeech, and even of thought, in France, that he might govern with the greater eafe. During his whole life, he had maintained a warfare of opinions in the kingdom, by his very endeavours to fmother thofe opinions, and prevent them from troubling the public repofe. He was terrified by the daringnefs of Voltaire; equally afraid of expofing himfelf, fhould he defend

the poet, or his trifling claims to renown, ſhould he abandon him with too much cowardice, Voltaire found him rather a clandeſtine perſecutor than a patron; but one who was retained by his reſpect for public opinion and his own fame.

Voltaire was deſigned to be his ſucceſſor in the French academy: he had lately acquired new claims which muſt have ſilenced envy, had ſhe been capable of a bluſh. He had enriched the ſtage by another maſter-piece: by Merope, the only tragedy in which tears freely and ſweetly flow, without the aid of the misfortunes of love. The author

author of Zaïre had before opposed the maxim of Boileau,

De cette passion la sensible peinture
*Est, pour aller au cœur, la route, la plus sure.**

He had affirmed that nature was capable of producing more feeling and more heart-rending effects on the stage; and in Merope, he proved his assertion.

If however Boileau, by *surest*, understood the *least difficult*, facts are in his favour. Various poets have written affecting tragedies founded on love: Merope stands alone.

* A pathetic picture of love, is the surest road to the heart.

Hurried

Hurried on by the intereſt of the ſituations, a rapidity of dialogue till then unknown to the ſtage, and by the talent of an actreſs who had caught the empaſſioned tones of nature, the pit was agitated with unexampled enthuſiaſm. Voltaire, who was concealed in a corner of the houſe, was obliged to appear before the ſpectators. He came into the box of the lady of Marſhal de Villars. The houſe called on the young ducheſs of Villars to kiſs the author of Merope ; and ſhe was under the neceſſity of obeying the imperious will of the public, intoxicated with admiration and pleaſure.

This

This was the firſt time that the pit called for the author of a piece; but what was then no more than homage, rendered to genius, degenerated afterward into cuſtom, and is now a ridiculous and humiliating ceremony, to which authors, who reſpect themſelves, refuſe to ſubmit.

To this new claim, which even devotion was obliged to reſpect, was added the ſupport of Madame de Châteauroux, then governed by the Duke de Richelieu; an extraordinary man, who, at the age of twenty, had twice been in the Baſtile, for the raſhneſs of his gallantries; who, by the rumour

and the number of his adventures, had made himſelf ſo faſhionable, among women, as for it to be almoſt regarded as an honour to be diſhonoured by him; and who, among his imitators, had formed a kind of gallantry in which love was no longer the inclination to pleaſure, but the vanity of ſeduction. This ſame man afterward contributed to the fame of the victory of Fontenoy, ſupported the revolution of Genoa, took port Mahon, and obliged an Engliſh army to lay down its arms; and when that army had broken the treaty, when it threatened his diſperſed and feeble quarters, he ſtopped its progreſs by his activity and boldneſs.

After

After which he funk into the intrigues of the court, and loft, in the manœuvres of a tyrannical and corrupt administration, that fame which might have obliterated his early errors.

The duke de Richelieu had from his infancy been the friend of Voltaire; and, though Voltaire had often caufe of complaint againft him, yet he preferved that remembrance of youthful affection which time cannot eradicate, and a kind of confidence which was rather maintained by habit than by conviction. The duke continued faithful to his old friend, as much as the levity of his character, his caprice, his

petty

petty despotism at the theatres, his contempt for every man who was not a courtier, his weakness toward people in power, and his insensibility for all that was noble, or useful, would permit.

At this period he promoted the interest of Voltaire with Madame de Châteauroux. But M. de Maurepas did not love Voltaire. The Abbé de Chaulieu had written an epigram against Oedipus, because he was offended to see a young man, who had become his rival in fugitive poetry into which philosophy and voluptuousness were infused, acquire the additional fame of succeed-

ſucceeding at the theatre; and M. de Maurepas, whoſe vanity was to be the man of moſt wit at table, could not pardon Voltaire for ſo evidently robbing him of this advantage, with which it was not too ridiculous, at that time, for a miniſter of ſtate to be flattered.

Voltaire attempted to diſarm his anger by an epiſtle, in which he beſtowed ſuch praiſe as might appear moſt natural to the mind and character of M. de Maurepas. This epiſtle, which contained as much inſtruction as eulogium, effected no change in the ſentiments of the miniſter; who, that he might prevent Voltaire from gaining

a place in the academy, combined with the prieſt Boyer, whom Fleury had preferred, as the tutor of the dauphin, to Maſſillon, whoſe talents and virtue he feared; and which Boyer he, on his death-bed, recommended to the king to the charge of beſtowing eccleſiaſtical benefices, apparently from the hope that his memory might be regretted by the Janſeniſts. M. de Maurepas was likewiſe glad to have an opportunity of ſecretly counteracting Madame de Châteauroux, with whoſe hatred for him he was well acquainted. Voltaire, being informed of his intention, went to him and aſked, if Madame de Châteauroux ſhould ſupport

him

him in the election, whether he would oppofe him. I will, anfwered the minifter, and *will crufh you**.

* In order to be juft, it is here neceffary to relate that having, after the death of Voltaire, mentioned this anecdote to the count de Maurepas, to whofe character fuch an anfwer does not feem natural, he, laughing, anfwered that it was the king himfelf who would not fuffer Voltaire to fucceed the Cardinal de Fleury, in his place of academician. His majefty thought there was too marked a diftance, between the men, to put the eulogium of the one, in the mouth of the other, and afford laughter to the public by fuch an affociation.

M. de Maurepas further added, that he had long known Voltaire had written the anecdote of *I will crufh you*. But this trifling act of injuftice, from a man fo celebrated, had not prevented him from foliciting and obtaining leave, from the prefent king, that the poet, who had been fo great an honour to his age and nation, might return to Paris, at the clofe of his life, there to enjoy the fruits of his fame.

This is the note of the general correfpondent of the literary typographical fociety.

He knew how eafy this would be to a minifter; and that, under a feeble government, the influence of a miftrefs muft yield to that of intriguing fanatic priefts, who were more defpicable than a proftitute, in the eyes of reafon, though more refpected by the populace. Boyer was triumphant.

The minifter foon after perceived how neceffary the alliance of the king of Pruffia was to France. But this monarch feared to engage anew with a power whofe timid and wavering policy could not infpire confidence. Voltaire, it was fuppofed, might induce him to change his opinion, and was fecretly

ſecretly charged with this negotiation. It was agreed that the perſecution of Boyer ſhould be the pretext of his journey into Pruſſia. He thus obtained the liberty to ridicule the poor prieſt, who went to complain to the king that Voltaire made him appear a fool in foreign courts. The king anſwered—" It was a ſettled point."

Voltaire departed, and Piron, at the head of his enemies, wrote abundance of epigrams and ſongs on his pretended diſgrace. Piron was in the habit of inſulting all celebrated men who underwent perſecution. His works abound with proofs of this mean malice;

lice; yet he had the character of a good natured man, because he was indolent; and, not having any native dignity of mind, he did not offend the vanity of others.

After having paſſed ſome time with the King of Pruſſia, who conſtantly refuſed all negociation with France, Voltaire had the addreſs to divine the true motive of his refuſal. It was the weakneſs that France had perſiſted in not to declare war againſt the Engliſh, and by this conduct to appear to entreat for peace, when ſhe had a right to dictate its conditions.

He

He returned to Paris and gave an account of his journey. The following spring the King of Pruſſia again declared war againſt the Queen of Hungary, by which uſeful diverſion he obliged her troops to evacuate Alſatia. This important ſervice, with that of having penetrated, as he paſſed through the Hague, into the views of the Dutch who apparently were in a ſtate of uncertainty, did not procure Voltaire any of thoſe marks of reſpect from which he wiſhed to raiſe a rampart againſt his literary enemies.

The Marquis D'Argenſon was called to the miniſtry. He was a man

who deſerves to be ranked among thoſe few people in power who have really loved philoſophy, and the public good. His taſte for literature had connected him with Voltaire, whom he more than once employed to write manifeſtos, declarations, and diſpatches, the ſtyle of which was required to be correct, dignified, and well adapted.

Such was the manifeſto which was to have been publiſhed by the Pretender, on his deſcent into Scotland with a ſmall French army, which the Duke de Richelieu was to have commanded. Voltaire had then an opportunity of labouring in conjunction with Count Lally,

Lally, a zealous Jacobite, and the determined enemy of the Engliſh; whoſe memory Voltaire afterward defended with ſo much fortitude when an unjuſt ſentence, executed with barbarity, ſacrificed him to the reſentment of ſome of the ſervants of the Eaſt India Company.

But he had, at the ſame time, a ſupport more potent in the Marchioneſs de Pompadour, with whom he had been intimate while her name was d'Etiole. She committed the writing of a piece to him, for the firſt marriage of the Dauphin. The place of gentleman of the chamber, the title of hiſ- toriographer

toriographer of France, and in fine the protection of the court, which was necessary to oppose the faction of devotees who excluded him the French academy, were the recompense he received. It was on this occasion that he wrote the following verses:

Mon Henri quatre et ma Zaïre,
Et mon Américaine Alzire,
Ne m'ont valu jamais un seul regard du Roi;
J'eus beaucoup d'ennemis, avec très-peu de gloire;
Les honneurs et les biens pleuvent enfin sur moi,
Pour une farce de la foire.*

This was passing rather too severe a judgment on the Princess of Navarre,

* The Henriade, Zaïre, and my American Alzire never obtained me a look from majesty; I had many enemies and little fame; but honours at length are showered on me, for having written a farce.

which

which is a work full of noble and affecting gallantry.

The favour of the court however was insufficient to open the doors of the academy. He was obliged, in order to disarm the devotees, to write a letter to Father la Tour, in which he made protestation of his respect for religion, and, which was more necessary, of his attachment to the Jesuits. In despight of the address with which he manages his language in that letter, it were better he had renounced the academy than have had the weakness to write it. This weakness would have been inexcusable had it been the sacrifice of vanity,

in

in order to obtain a title which had long been incapable of adding honour to the name of Voltaire. But he ſuppoſed it his ſhield; he imagined he ſhould find ſupport againſt perſecution from the academy. He preſumed too favourably of the fortitude and juſtice of his aſſociates.

In his diſcourſe to the academy, he firſt threw off the yoke of cuſtom, by which theſe diſcourſes ſeemed rather condemned to be a ſtring of compliments than of true praiſe. Voltaire boldly ſpoke of literature and of taſte, and his example is in ſome manner become a law, againſt which the academicians,

micians, who are men of letters, rarely venture to err. But he did not go ſo far as to ſuppreſs their reiterated praiſe of Richelieu, Séguier, and Louis XIV. which has hitherto been done only by two or three of the boldeſt academicians. He mentioned Crébillon, in his diſcourſes, with the noble generoſity of a man who fears not to honour the talents of a rival, or to afford arms to his own antagoniſts.

A new torrent of libels was poured upon him, which he had not the fortitude to deſpiſe. The police was, at that time, committed to a man who had paſſed ſome months in the country with

Madame

Madame de Pompadour. A wretched muſician, of the opera band, was arreſted, whoſe name was Travenol, and and who, with the advocate Rigoley de Juvigny, privately ſold theſe libels. The father of Travenol, an old man of eighty, went to Voltaire, and demanded pardon for his guilty ſon; and the anger of the poet was huſhed by the firſt cry of humanity. He wept with, embraced, and conſoled the old man; and haſtened away with him, to obtain the liberty of his ſon.

Voltaire was not long in favour. Madame de Pompadour cauſed thoſe honours to be conferred on Crébillon, which

which he had been refuſed. Voltaire had conſtantly done juſtice to the author of Rhadamiſtus, but he could not be ſo humble as to ſuppoſe him ſuperior to the author of Alzire, Mahomet, and Merope. In ſuch exaggerated enthuſiaſm for Crébillon, he diſcovered nothing but a ſecret deſire that he himſelf ſhould be humbled: nor was he deceived.

The wit and the poet might have preſerved powerful friends; but theſe titles in Voltaire concealed a philoſopher, a man more earneſt for the progreſs of reaſon, than the acquirement of perſonal fame.

His

His character, naturally proud and independent, yielded to ingenious adulation; he was prodigal of praiſe, but he preſerved his feelings and his opinions, and the freedom of diſcovering them. Strong or affecting leſſons roſe out of panegyric; but that manner of praiſing which might ſucceed at the court of Frederic, could not but offend at any other court.

He therefore returned to Cirey, and ſoon afterwards to the court of Staniſlaus. This prince, twice elected king of Poland, once by the will of Charles XII. and once by the deſire of the nation, never poſſeſſed more than

the

the title of ſovereign. Having retired into Lorraine with this title, he there repaired, by his beneficent acts, the ills which the French adminiſtration had committed: the paternal government of Leopold corrected an age of deveſtation and misfortune. His devotion had neither deprived him of the love of pleaſure nor of an affection for men of wit. His houſe was that of a wealthy private perſon; his manners thoſe of native candour; of a man who had never been unhappy, except becauſe others had determined to make him a king; nor ever dazzled by a title, from which he had derived nothing but danger. He wiſhed to ſee

Madame du Chatelet and Voltaire at his court, or rather living as his inmates. The author of the ſeaſons *, the only French poet, who like Voltaire has united philoſophy and wit, then lived at Luneville, where he was only known as an amiable young officer; but his firſt poetical productions, full of reaſon, wit, and taſte, even then beſpoke a man born to be an honour to his age.

At Luneville, where Voltaire lived life of occupation and mild tranquillity, he had the misfortune to loſe his friend. Madame du Charelet died,

* St. Lambert.

at

at the moment when she had finished her translation of Newton; the labour of which had shortened her days. King Stanislaus went to console and weep with Voltaire in his chamber.

Having returned to Paris, the poet betook himself to his labours, a means of dissipating grief, which nature has imparted but to few. Such a power over our thoughts, and such force of mind, which affliction cannot vanquish, are precious gifts, which must not be depreciated by confounding them with want of feeling. Sensibility is not weakness; it is a capability of grief, without being overwhelmed by it: the

 soul

ſoul is not the leſs affectionate, nor has ſorrow been leſs ſincere, becauſe oppoſed with fortitude; or becauſe conquered by extraordinary powers.

Voltaire was weary of hearing the faſhionable world, and moſt men of letters, prefer Crébillon to himſelf; which they did leſs from opinion than to puniſh him for the univerſality of his talents. Men are ever more indulgent to circumſcribed genius, which exerted on one object appears to be a kind of inſtinct, becauſe it offends not ſo many ſpecies of ſelf-love, and humbles their pride leſs.

This

This opinion of the ſuperiority of Crébillon was maintained with ſo much paſſion, that, in the preliminary diſcourſe to the Encyclopedia, M. D'Alembert had need of fortitude to grant equality to the author of Alzire and Merope, and durſt not extend juſtice further. Voltaire at length determined to avenge himſelf, and oblige the public to give him his true rank, by writing Semiramis, Oreſtes, and Rome Preſerved; which three ſubjects had before been treated by Crébillon. Every cabal that had been formed againſt Voltaire had united, to obtain momentary ſucceſs for the Cataline of his rival; a piece, the conduct of which is abſurd and the

ſtyle barbarous; in which Cicero propoſes that his daughter ſhould ſeduce Cataline, and a high prieſt appoints a rendezvous for the lovers in a temple, where he introduces a courtezan in men's clothes, and afterward treats the ſenate as impious, becauſe it there diſcuſſed on ſtate affairs.

On the contrary, Rome Preſerved is the maſter-piece of ſtyle and of reaſon, in which Cicero appears with all his dignity and eloquence; in which Cæſar ſpeaks and acts like a man born to reduce Rome to ſubjection, to overwhelm his opponents by his glory, and obtain pardon for tyranny by the force

of

of his talents and virtues; and in which Cataline is a villain, but one who endeavours to excuse his vices from example, and his crimes from necessity. Republican energy and Roman feelings entirely possess the poet.

Voltaire had a small theatre on which he acted his pieces, and where he often played the part of Cicero. Never, it is said, was illusion more complete: while he recited he appeared to create his character; and when, in the fifth act, Cicero again appeared before the senate, when he excused his love of fame by reciting the following beautiful lines:

Romains, j'aime la gloire, et ne veux point m'en taire;
Des travaux des humains c'est le digne salaire,
Sénat, en vous servant il la faut acheter;
Qui n'ose la vouloir, n'ose la mériter *.

the character and the poet were one, and the auditor imagined he heard Cicero, or Voltaire, avow and excuse this weakness of great minds.

There is only one good part in the Electra of Crébillon, and this is a subaltern character. Orestes, who knows not that he is Orestes, is in love with the daughter of Ægysthus, who has the

Romans, I frankly own my thirst for fame,
The rich reward of peril, pain, and care;
Most nobly purchas'd in our country's cause!
Who dare not hope for, cannot merit fame.

mis-

misfortune to be called Iphianaſſa. The implacable Electra is enamoured with the ſon of Ægyſthus, and theſe inſipid amours occupy the ſcene, while the furies are leading a bewildered ſon to the commiſſion of parricide; being condemned by the gods to take this horrible revenge.

Voltaire felt that Clytemneſtra ſhould be rendered intereſting by her remorſe, by being characteriſed as rather feeble than guilty, and overawed by the cruel Ægyſthus, but aſhamed of having loved him, and ſenſible of the weight of her chains and of her crimes. If we compare this with the other tragedies of

Voltaire.

Voltaire, we ſhall, no doubt, find it much inferior to his beſt works; but if we contraſt it with Sophocles, whom he meant to follow, that he might teach the French the character and tragic conceptions of that poet, we ſhall perceive he had the art to preſerve his beauties, imitate his ſtyle, correct his defects, and render Clytemneſtra more pathetic, and Electra leſs barbarous. For which reaſon, when, in deſpite of cabal, the permanent beauties of the Greek poet were tranſmitted to the French ſtage, by a man worthy of becoming the interpreter of the moſt eloquent of the ancient tragic writers, and there enforce applauſe, Voltaire, more

more ardent in the intereſt of good taſte than in behalf of his own fame, could not forbear calling to the pit, in a momentary effuſſion of rapture, "Go on Athenians, it is Sophocles."

The Semiramis of Crébillon was no ſooner produced than forgotten. That of Voltaire is the ſame ſubject which, fifteen years before, he had treated under the name of Eryphile, and which he withdrew from the ſtage, though the piece was highly applauded. During its repreſentations, he more perfectly felt all the difficulties of the fable. He perceived that, to render a woman who had deſtroyed her huſband, that

that ſhe might reign herſelf, intereſting, it was neceſſary that the ſplendour of her reign, her conqueſts, her virtues, and the extent of her empire ſhould force reſpect, and ſeize on the mind of the ſpectators; that the criminal queen ſhould be the miſtreſs of the world, and poſſeſs the virtues of a great monarch. He felt that, while exhibiting the prodigies of a foreign religion on the ſtage, it would be neceſſary, by magnificence and an elevated and religious ſtyle, not to ſuffer the imagination to cool, to make the gods interfere on all occaſions, and to conceal the abſurdity of a miracle by inceſſantly preſenting the conſolatory idea of a

Divine

Divine Power, exercifing a flow but inevitable vengeance on the fecret crimes of kings.

Love, offenfive in Oreftes, was neceffary in Semiramis. Ninyas muft have a miftrefs, that he might feel a tendernefs for Semiramis, be fenfible of her kindnefs, and that fhe might facinate him by her charms before he knew her to be his mother; otherwife the horror which inceft infpires would have been injurious to that character which was to intereft the audience. The ftyle of Semiramis, the majefty of the fubject, the pomp of the exhibition, and the peculiar pathos of fome of the

fcenes,

ſcenes, were triumphant over envy and faction. But it was long before equal juſtice was rendered to Oreſtes, and Rome Preſerved.

Complete juſtice, perhaps, has not yet been done; nor can we be ſurpriſed at this, when we recollect that all colleges and all the houſes in which the teachers of youth are themſelves educated are devoted to fanaticiſm, and that children in general are educated in prejudices againſt Voltaire.

Theſe three pieces he wrote at Sceaux, the ſeat of the Ducheſs du Maine, who delighted in poetry, gallantry,

lantry, and the arts; and who in her palace, preſented a picture of thoſe ingenuous and ſplendid pleaſures which had embelliſhed the court of Lewis the XIVth, and dignified his follies. She delighted in Cicero, and prevailed on Voltaire to write his Rome Preſerved to avenge the outrage committed on the orator by Crébillon. Mahomet was ſent to the pope, and Semiramis dedicated to a cardinal. He took a ſecret pleaſure in convincing the French fanatics that the eccleſiaſtical princes knew how to combine the love of genius with religious zeal, and that they did not think they promoted Chriſtianity by treating theſe men as its ene-

mies

mies, who by their powers of mind were the formidable rulers of public opinion.

It was at this period that he, at length, yielded to the invitations of the king of Pruſſia, and accepted the title of Chamberlain, the grand croſs of the order of merit, and a penſion of 20,000 livres. In his own country, he ſaw himſelf the object of envy and hatred to men of letters, although he never had been their opponent in ſoliciting for places and penſions, never had humbled them by his criticiſms, nor ever had interfered in literary cabals, but had obliged all who needed

ed his ſervices, had endeavoured to gain their affection by praiſing them and taken every opportunity of winning the friendſhip of thoſe whom ſelf-love had rendered unjuſt.

The prieſts, who forgot not the Letters on the Engliſh Nation and Mahomet, while they were waiting occaſion to perſecute him, endeavoured to decry him and his works, and employed their whole aſcendancy over youth againſt him, eſpecially that which, as ſpiritual directors, they preſerved over private families and the devotees of the court. Abſolute ſilence only could preſerve him from calumny. He could pub-

lish no work without being certain that malignity would endeavour thence to accuſe him of being impious, or to render him ſuſpected by government. Madame de Pompadour, elevated to a ſituation in which ſhe wiſhed to be ſurrounded by none but ſlaves, forgot their former intimacy. She could not pardon his not having ſuffered with ſufficient patience the preference granted to Crébillon. Louis the XVth had a kind of diſlike to Voltaire, although he had flattered that prince to the injury of his own fame: but kings are, by habit, rendered almoſt inſenſible to public adulation; the artful praiſe of the courtiers, who, ſeizing every

every trifling occaſion, repeat their panegyric continually and at the luckieſt moments, is alone ſeducing. This flattery conſiſts leſs in direct praiſe, than in an adroit approbation of the paſſions, inclinations, acts, and ſentiments of the monarch; half a word, a motion, a general maxim which excuſes their follies or their faults, produce greater effects than poetry which is worthy of poſterity. The eulogies of genius ſoothe only thoſe kings who have an actual love of fame.

It is ſaid that Voltaire, approaching Louis XV. after the repreſentation of the Temple of Fame, in which

Trajan after his victories accords peace to the world, and receives the crown which had been refused to conquerors and reserved for the man who was the friend of humanity, thus addressed the monarch—*Trajan est-il content* * ? and that the king was less flattered by the comparison than offended by the familiarity.

M. d'Argenson refused to support Voltaire as a candidate for the title of Free Associate of the Academy of Sciences, and for obtaining a seat in the Academy of Belles Lettres, of which places he was at that time ambitious, as

* Is Trajan satisfied?

a refuge

a refuge againſt the army of periodical critics who were obliged by the police to treat literary bodies with reſpect, except when other bodies or powerful individuals thought it their intereſt to humble them by abandoning them to the attacks of theſe contemptible enemies.

Voltaire, therefore, went to Berlin, and the very monarch, who had diſdained him, and the court, in which he had been treated with diſreſpect, were offended at his departure. The loſs of a man who honoured France, and the diſgrace of having obliged him to ſeek an aſylum in another country,

were then only remembered. In the palace of the king of Pruſſia, he found peace and even the ſemblance of freedom; feeling at firſt no kind of ſubjection, except that of paſſing ſome hours with the king to correct his works, and to teach him the art of writing. He uſually ſupped with his majeſty; and theſe ſuppers, at which there was freedom in exceſs, where every queſtion of metaphyſics and morals was diſcuſſed without reſtraint, where the moſt unbounded pleaſantry enlivened, or cut ſerious argument ſhort, and where the king generally diſappeared to give place to the man of wit, were moments of agreeable relaxtion to Voltaire. The remainder

remainder of his time was confecrated to ftudy.

Here he improved fome of his tragedies, finifhed his Age of Louis the XIVth, corrected his poem of the the Maid of Orleans, wrote part of his Effay on the Manners and Spirit of Nations, and compofed the poem on Natural Law; while Frederic governed his ftates without a minifter, infpected and improved his army, compofed poetry and mufic, and wrote philofophy and hiftory.

The royal family encouraged Voltaire in his purfuits; he addreffed

 verfes

verſes to the princeſſes, acted tragedy with the brothers and ſiſters of the king, and, while he taught them to declaim, led them to feel the beauties of French poetry: for poetry ought to be ſpoken aloud; nor can it be underſtood, in a foreign tongue, by thoſe who are not in the habit of hearing it recited by ſpeakers, who can give it that accent and force which are its characteriſtics.

This, Voltaire called the palace of Alcina; but the enchantment was of too ſhort duration. The men of literature, who had been longer at Berlin than himſelf, were jealous of prefer-

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ence which was too confpicuous, efpecially of that kind of independence which he preferved, that familiarity which the charms and brilliancy of his wit gave him, and that art of mingling truth with panegyric and of imparting to flattery the tone of jocular eafe.

La Métrie told Voltaire that the king, to whom he was one day mentioning thofe marks of kindnefs he difcovered for his chamberlain, replied, "I want him at prefent to revife my works; but having fucked the orange, we throw away the rind." When Voltaire heard this, the encantation was over; and his mind felt that kind of

fufpicion

ſuſpicion which never ſuffered him to loſe ſight of his project for eſcaping.

In the mean time the king was informed that Voltaire, being preſſed by general Manſtein to reviſe his memoirs, had anſwered, " The king has ſent me his dirty linen to waſh, yours muſt wait ;" and that, another time, he had ſaid in a fit of ill humour, pointing to ſome poetical papers of the king, lying on the table, " That man is Cæſar and the Abbé Cottin."

Mutual inclination, however, acted on the monarch and the philoſopher. Frederic ſaid, long after their ſeparation,

tion, that he had never met with ſo amiable a man as Voltaire; and Voltaire, notwithſtanding his reſentment which never was entirely effaced, confeſſed, that when Frederic thought proper, he was the moſt pleaſing of mankind. They likewiſe united in their open contempt for prejudice and ſuperſtition; the pleaſure they took in making them the eternal objects of their jeſts, their common love for that philoſophy which is chearful and inviting, and their mutual diſpoſition to ſearch and to ſeize on the ridiculous in whatever pretended to ſuperior gravity, were the ſame. Hence it ſhould have ſeemed that the ſtorm muſt have ended

ended in a calm, and that intereſt and pleaſure muſt have continued them in friendſhip; but the jealouſy of Maupertuis rendered them irreconcilable.

Maupertuis, a man of much wit, but not of too much learning, and of ſtill leſs philoſophy, was tormented by that deſire of fame which makes us chuſe trifling means when the great are wanting, utter paradoxes when we are unable to diſcover truths, generaliſe formula when we cannot invent them*, and accumulate incongruities when we are deficient in new ideas. In Paris, he had been ſeen to leave the company, or hide himſelf behind a ſcreen,

a ſcreen, when he could not continue the principal ſpeaker; and in like manner at Berlin, whether at the academy of ſciences or the table of the king, he would be the firſt. He was indebted to Voltaire for a great part of his reputation, as well as for the honour of being perpetual preſident of the academy of Berlin, and of exerciſing authority there in his majeſty's name.

Some jeſts which Voltaire had indulged in, when Maupertuis, following the king to the army, was taken priſoner at the battle of Molwitz, had angered him, and he vented his complaints with ill humour. Voltaire returned

turned a friendly anfwer, and appeafed him by writing four lines for his portrait. Maupertuis, fome years afterward, took it much amifs that Voltaire had not mentioned him in his difcourfe when elected to the French academy; and the arrival of Voltaire at Berlin completed his difguft. He faw him the friend of the fovereign, in whofe prefence he himfelf was but a courtier; and beheld him giving leffons to the man from whom he received orders.

Surrounded by enemies, and diffident of the continuance of royal friendfhip, Voltaire fecretly regretted, and endea-

endeavoured to recover, his loſt independence. He thought proper to employ a jew to transfer a part of his property out of Pruſſia. The jew betrayed his truſt; and, to revenge himſelf on Voltaire, who, having detected him, would not ſuffer himſelf to be robbed, he brought an abſurd action, knowing that hatred is not difficult in admitting evidence. The king, to puniſh his *friend* for having attempted to preſerve his liberty and property, pretended to believe him guilty, to deliver him up to juſtice, and even to exclude him his preſence till the cauſe ſhould be determined.

Voltaire addreſſed himſelf to Maupertuis, who had not yet openly teſtified his ſentiments, and requeſted his interference with the chief judge. Maupertuis returned a haughty refuſal, and Voltaire perceived he had another enemy. This ridiculous ſuit, at length, ended as it ſhould do; the jew was condemned, and was pardoned by Voltaire. The king then admitted Voltaire once more, and added new marks of reſpect to former kindneſs, by beſtowing on him a houſe near Potſdam.

The eyes of hatred, however, are always open and watchful of opportunity.

nity. La Beaumelle, a proteſtant, and native of Languedoc, firſt an apprentice to a goſpel miniſter at Geneva, and afterwards acting the French wit in Denmark, being ſoon diſmiſſed from Copenhagen, came to ſeek his fortune at Berlin; having no other title to fame than that of having lately publiſhed a libel. He went to Voltaire, and preſented the book to him, in which Voltaire himſelf was ill treated, and in which the men of wit, who had been invited into Pruſſia, among whom he was come to ſolicit a place, was compared to apes or theſe dwarfs who had formerly been maintained at certain courts. Such a ridiculous overſight

was the momentary object of pleaſantry at the king's ſupper; but the jeſts were reported to La Beaumelle by Maupertuis, who, charging them all to the account of Voltaire, made La Beaumelle his irreconcilable foe, and ſecured to himſelf a tool, who aided his malice by ſhameful libels, without bringing the character of the preſident of the academy in queſtion.

Maupertuis wanted aſſiſtance; he had lately advanced the *leaſt poſſible action*, as a new mechanical principle, which was much controverted, though the illuſtrious Euler did it the honour of defending it, and at the ſame

time inſtructed its author in its full extent and true uſe. Koënig not only oppoſed it, but aſſerted it was not new, and quoted the fragment of a letter from Leibnitz, in which it was contained. Maupertuis, having learnt from Koënig himſelf that he had only a copy of the letter from Leibnitz, thought proper formally to ſummons him before the academy of Berlin, to produce the original. Koënig anſwered that he obtained his copy from the unfortunate Hienzi, who had long ſince been beheaded, for having attempted to deliver the people of the Canton of Bern from the tyranny of the ſenate. The original was not to be found among the remaining papers

 of

of Hienzi, and the academy, from motives partly of fear and partly of meanneſs, declared Koënig unworthy of the title of academician, and ſtruck him from their liſt. Maupertuis ſeemed not to have known that the general voice of the learned only could beſtow, or take from him, the honour of making a diſcovery, that this opinion muſt be free and voluntary, and that any formal act, by rendering it ſuſpicious, would but diminiſh its authority.

Voltaire had been acquainted with Koënig at Cirey, where he came to give leſſons in the doctrines of Leibnitz to Madame du Chatelet. He had preſerved

ſerved a degree of friendſhip for him, though he had ſometimes indulged himſelf in jeſts to his diſadvantage, during his reſidence in France. He did not love Maupertuis, and hated perſecution, whatever form it might aſſume to torment mankind; he therefore openly took the part of Koënig, and publiſhed ſome writings, in which reaſon and juſtice were ſeaſoned by delicate and poignant wit. Maupertuis engaged the vanity of the king in behalf of the honour of his academy, and prevailed on him to exact a promiſe from Voltaire to ridicule neither it nor its preſident. The promiſe was given, but unfortunately the king, who had

commanded ſilence, imagined he himſelf might ſpeak. He wrote ſeveral humourous pieces, which, but with ſome little inequality, were partly againſt Maupertuis, and partly againſt Voltaire. The latter imagined that the king, by this conduct, had releaſed him from his promiſe, and that the privilege of being the only one who ſhould laugh was not included in the royal prerogative. He, therefore, profited by a general permiſſion which he had formerly obtained, and ſent his *Akakia* to the preſs, in which Maupertuis was devoted to eternal ridicule.

The king laughed. He had little affection, and leſs eſteem for Mauper-

tuis;

tuis; yet, jealous of his own authority, he caufed this piece of humour to be burnt by the hangman. This is a mode of vengeance which it is rather fingular that a philofophic king fhould borrow from the inquifition.

The infulted Voltaire fent the monarch his crofs, his key, and the patent for his penfion, with the four following lines—

Je les reçu avec tendreffe,
Je les renvoie avec douleur;
Comme un amant, dans fa jaloufe ardeur,
*Rend le portrait de fa maîtreffe**.

* Thefe gifts I took, with joy of heart,
From them with grief, as great, I part;
The jealous lover, thus, returns
Her gifts, for whom his bofom burns.

He ſighed for freedom, but he could not obtain this by ſending back what he at firſt had called *ſplendid baubles*, but which he ever afterward named *marks of ſlavery*. He wrote from Berlin, where he was ill, for permiſſion to depart. The king, who wiſhed to humble but not to loſe him, ſent him ſome bark, but no permiſſion. He again wrote that it was neceſſary he ſhould go and drink the waters of Plombiers; he was anſwered, thoſe of Sileſia were equally ſalutary.

Voltaire, at length, thought proper to aſk to ſee his majeſty, flattering himſelf that by his preſence he could

awaken

awaken ſentiments which were rather wounded than extinct.

The baubles he had formerly poſſeſſed were returned to him. He haſtened to Potſdam, ſaw the king, and a few moments produced a total change. Familiarity revived, former chearfulneſs was recovered even at the expence of Maupertuis, and Voltaire obtained permiſſion to go to Plombiers, on giving his promiſe to return. This promiſe was not, perhaps, very ſincere, but it was leſs obligatory than one given between equals; the hundred and fifty thouſand men, who guarded the Pruſſian frontiers would not ſuffer

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it to be confidered as given with entire freedom.

Voltaire haftened to Leipfic, where he made fome ftay, to recover his ftrength, which had been exhaufted by this long perfecution. Maupertuis fent him a ridiculous challenge, the only effect of which was, that it opened a new fource to his inexhauftible pleafantry. From Leipfic he went to vifit the Duchefs of Saxe-Gotha, a princefs, who cultivated letters, loved philofophy, and was fuperior to prejudice. At her requeft he there began his Annals of the Empire.

From

From Gotha, he departed for Plombiers; and took the road to Frankfort. Maupertuis was determined on revenge; his challenge had been unſucceſsful, and the libels of La Beaumelle he thought inſufficient. This his contemptible ſecond had been obliged to quit Berlin, after a ridiculous adventure and ſome weeks impriſonment. He had fled to Gotha with a chambermaid, who had robbed the miſtreſs ſhe had left; his libels had driven him from Frankfort; and he had ſcarcely arrived at Paris before he was thrown into the Baſtile. The preſident of the academy at Berlin had therefore to ſeek another avenger. He embittered the ill

ill humour of the king. The ſlowneſs with which Voltaire travelled, his ſtay at Gotha, and a conſiderable annuity for the lives of himſelf and his neice Madame Denis purchaſed of the Duke of Wirtemberg, all ſpoke his determination of never returning to Pruſſia, and he had taken with him a copy of the poetical works of the king, which were then only known to the wits of the court.

A fear was excited in Frederic's mind that a ſpecies of vengeance, terrible even to a royal poet, would betaken. It was poſſible, at leaſt, that Voltaire ſhould imagine he had a right to reclaim

claim the verſes he had given, and to ſpecify thoſe he had corrected. The king gave a knave, whom he kept in his pay at Frankfort to purchaſe or kidnap men for him, an order to arreſt Voltaire, and not to releaſe him till he ſhould have yielded up his croſs, his key, and the grant of his penſion, together with the poems which Freitag called "the work of *Poeſhys* of the king his maſter." Theſe volumes had unfortunately been left at Leipſic, and Voltaire was kept in cloſe confinement for three weeks. Madame Denis his neice, who had come to meet him, was treated with like rigour. Guards were placed at the door, and a ſoldier continued

in

in each of their chambers who never ſuffered them to leave his ſight, ſuch fears were entertained leaſt the work of *Poeſhys* ſhould eſcape. This precious pledge was at length reſtored to Freitag, and Voltaire was releaſed; but not however till he had been obliged to beſtow money on certain adventurers who took that opportunity to commence litigious ſuits: having eſcaped from Frankfort he went to Colmar.

The King of Pruſſia, aſhamed of his ridiculous anger, diſavowed the proceedings of Freitag, but he had ſo much morality as not to puniſh him for having obeyed. It is ſtrange that a

city,

city, calling itſelf free, ſhould ſuffer a foreign power to commit ſuch vexations within its walls; but freedom and independence are to the feeble mere words. During the period of his friendſhip for Voltaire, Frederic, in the tranſports of enthuſiaſm, has often kiſſed his hands; and Voltaire, after his impriſonment, comparing the two periods, ſaid to his friends—"He has a hundred times kiſſed the hand he ſo lately manacled."

The only work he publiſhed at Berlin was the age of Louis XIV. which is the ſole hiſtory of that reign, which can be read. On the authority of the old courtiers

courtiers of Louis XIV. or of thoſe who had lived in intimacy with them, he there relates a ſmall number of anecdotes ſelected with diſcernment, and ſuch as ſerve to paint the ſpirit and character of the perſons of the age. Political and military events are given in a rapid, intereſting manner; the picture abounds with bold ſtrokes. In ſome chapters, he recounts the attempts which Louis XIV. made for the improvement of the laws and finances, and for the encouragement of trade and induſtry; and we ought to pardon Voltaire for having, on this occaſion, followed the opinions of the moſt enlightened men

of

of his own times, inſtead of that knowledge which did not then exiſt.

His chapters on Calviniſm, Janſeniſm, Quietiſm, and the diſpute on the Chineſe ceremonies, are models of the manner in which a prudent friend of truth ought to treat theſe maladies ſo diſgraceful to man, when the number or the power of the diſeaſed is ſuch as to make it neceſſary gently to raiſe the veil which conceals their deformity. We have only to reproach him with too much ſeverity againſt the Calviniſts, whoſe enormities proceeded from ſelf-defence, and whoſe crimes were but a kind of repriſal of juridical murders

committed on them in certain provinces.

The diſcoveries made in the ſciences, and the progreſs of the arts, Voltaire related with clearneſs, preciſion, and impartiality; and his deciſions continually appeared dictated by a free and ſound mind, and a mild indulgent philoſophy.

The catalogue of the writers of the age of Louis XIV. was an original thought. It had never before entered the imagination, thus, by a trait or a few lines, to paint men of literature, philoſophers, and poets, without dryneſs

neſs or affectation, with taſte ſeldom miſtaken, and accuracy ever poignant.

The work brought foreign nations acquainted with Louis XIV. among whom he had been disfigured by a multitude of libels, and taught them to reſpect a people whom they had previouſly viewed through the falſe medium of prejudice, jealouſy, and hatred. The countrymen of Voltaire were leſs indulgent. Such as were ſlaves from condition or character were highly offended that a Frenchman ſhould dare to diſcover follies in Louis XIV. Prejudiced people were angry at the freedom with which he treated the miſ-

takes of generals, and the defects of great writers; and others, who in ſome reſpects were more juſt, reproached him with too much indulgence or enthuſiaſm. But hiſtory is never impartially judged in the country to which it relates, the deciſions of whoſe inhabitants are continually perverted by jarring intereſts and pre-conceived falſe ideas.

Voltaire paſſed near two years in Alſatia, during which he publiſhed his Annals of the Empire, the only chronologic abridgement which can be read without wearineſs, becauſe it is written in a rapid ſtyle and abounds with philoſophic

losophic deductions, expressed with energy. Thus Voltaire has given a model of that kind of writing, the merit and utility of which his friendship for the President Hénault induced him to exaggerate.

He thought, at first, of settling in Alsatia; but, unfortunately, the Jesuits attempted to convert him, and, not succeeding, began to disseminate calumniating rumours which bespoke persecution. Voltaire endeavoured to obtain not permission to return to Paris, for this he had never been forbidden, but an assurance that he should not be disagreeable to the court. He knew France

too well not to be ſenſible that, odious as he was by his love of truth to all powerful bodies, he muſt ſoon become the object of their perſecution, would the court ſuffer him to be oppreſſed.

The anſwer was not to his ſatisfaction. Voltaire found himſelf unprotected in his own country, though his name ſupported its honour, at that time degraded throughout Europe by ridiculous quarrels concerning Billets of Confeſſion; and at the very moment when, by his publication of the Age of Louis the XVth, he had erected a monument to its glory. He determined to go and drink the waters of Aix, in

Savoy.

Savoy. Paſſing through Lyons, Cardinal de Tençin, famous for the converſion of Laſs and the council of Embrun, informed him he could not invite him to dinner, becauſe Voltaire was out of favour at court. But the inhabitants of that opulent city, in which the ſpirit of trade has not effaced the love of letters, recompenſed him for the politic incivility of their archbiſhop. He there received thoſe honours which public enthuſiaſm pays to genius. His pieces were played before him, amid the loud acclamations of a people, inebriated with the joy of poſſeſſing the man to whom they were indebted for ſuch dignified pleaſures. But he durſt not fix

his abode at Lyons; the conduct of the Cardinal informed him he was not far enough from his enemies.

Paſſing through Geneva, to conſult with Tronchin, the beauty of the country, the equality which appeared to prevail there, the advantage of being out of France, and in a city where French was the language of the people, the freedom of thought which was greater than in a monarchial or catholic country, and the liberty of the the preſs, founded indeed leſs on the laws than on the intereſts of trade, all determined him to fix his retreat in that place.

But

But he ſoon perceived that a city in which the pedantic and auſtere ſpirit of Calvin had taken deep root, where the vanity of imitating ancient republics, and the jealouſy of the poor againſt the rich had eſtabliſhed ſumptuary laws, where theatrical exhibitions offended both Calviniſtic fanaticiſm, and republican rigour, would to him neither be a ſafe nor an agreeable reſidence. He determined to procure a place of refuge in the territories of Geneva againſt Catholic perſecution, and a retreat in France againſt puritanical gloom, and accordingly to live alternately at Tourney, ſince called Ferney, in France, and the *Delices* at the gates of Geneva.

Here

Here he fixed his abode with Madame Dennis his niece; who, being a widow without children, was free to indulge her friendſhip for her uncle, and to acknowledge the kindneſs with which he had rendered her circumſtances eaſy. She took on herſelf the charge of his domeſtic affairs; and, to increaſe his tranquillity, by relieving him from ſuch fatiguing trifles. This was the only aid he received; labour was to him an inexhauſtible ſource of enjoyment; and freedom was all he wanted to render his moments happy.

Hitherto, we have written the tempeſtuous life of a philoſophic poet, whoſe

whofe love for truth, and whofe independence of character had occafioned him more enemies than friends, who gave no reply to their malice except by epigrams which were either witty or dreadfully fevere, and whofe conduct had more frequently been guided by the fenfations of the moment than the refult of any plan which reafon had formed.

In his prefent retirement, removed from illufion and whatever could excite momentary or perfonal paffion, we fhall fee him yield entirely to his prevailing and inceffant love of fame, to the ftill more potent neceffity his mind

mind felt of being productive, and to his zeal for the destruction of prejudice, which was indeed the most powerful and active of all the sensations he felt. This peaceful life, seldom disturbed, and then by the threats of persecution, rather than persecution itself, we shall see adorned not only, like his youth, by the exercise of private benevolence, a quality common to all men whose hearts have not been hardened and minds corrupted by misfortune or vanity, but by those acts of enlightened and bold benevolence, which, while they relieve the sufferings of certain individuals, are of service to the whole human race.

And

And hence it was that, indignant to behold a corrupt minifter purfue the the unfortunate Byng to death that he might conceal his own errors and flatter the pride of the Englifh populace, Voltaire, in order to refcue this innocent victim from the Machiavelian arts of Pitt, employed every means which genius and compaffion could infpire, and fingly raifed his voice againft injuftice; while aftonifhed Europe in filience faw fuch an example of atrocity worthy of the moft barbarous times, which England dared to give in this age of humanity and knowledge.

The firft work he fent from his retreat was the Orphan of China, a tragedy

gedy written during his residence in Alsatia, at a time when he hoped he might have been allowed to live at Paris, and was desirous of theatrical success to secure his friends and impose silence on his foes.

In the commencement of the tragic art, poets were certain of astonishing the mind by giving to their characters sentiments contrary to nature, and by sacrificing the true feelings of the heart to the more uncommon love of fame, exaggerated patriotism, and devotedness to princes.

As reason, at such a period, is even inferior to taste, vulgar opinion seconds such

ſuch as employ thoſe means, or are ſeduced by them. Leontine neceſſarily inſpires admiration; and the haughtineſs of his character induces an audience, who idolize their king, to pardon him the ſacrifice of his ſon. But when means like theſe, of producing effects by a departure from nature, begin to be exhauſted, and when art improves, the poet is then obliged to write more conformably to reaſon, and ſeek reſources in nature herſelf. Yet, ſuch is the force of habit, the ſacrifice of Zamti, founded indeed on more dignified and powerful motives than that of Leontine, expiated by tears and regret, ſeduced the ſpectators.

Aſtoniſh

Aſtoniſhment only was excited at the firſt repreſentation of the Orphan, by the following truly philoſophic lines:

La Nature et l'Hymen, voilà les lois premières,
Les devoirs, les liens des nations entières;
Ces lois viennent des dieux, le reſte eſt des humains.*

The audience heſitated, and the voice of nature needed the aid of reflection in order to be heard. Thus can a great poet ſometimes decide the mind between ancient errors and truths, which, to vanquiſh wavering yet ſtill oppoſing prejudice, is obliged to wait for new ſupport. Men often dare not

* Nature and Hymen firſt gave laws to earth;
Their origin divine, the reſt is human all.

confeſs

confefs to themfelves that flow progrefs which reafon makes in their minds; but they are ready to follow her when, appearing in a ftrong and effective manner, they are obliged to acknowledge her prefence. Thus, thefe fame verfes have fince been continually heard with tranfport, and Voltaire enjoyed the pleafure of having avenged nature.

This play is the triumph of virtue over power, and of the laws over arms. Till then, Mahomet excepted, no poet had fuccefsfully made one of thefe men, whofe fame appears awful, and whofe characters prefent the picture of ex-

 traordinary

traordinary ſtrength of ſoul, in love without degradation. Voltaire, a ſecond time conquered this difficulty; the love of Gengis Khan is interreſting in deſpight of the violence and ferocity of his character, becauſe it is true and impaſſioned, becauſe it wreſts from him a confeſſion of the vacancy his heart felt amid all his power, and becauſe he at laſt ſacrifices his love to fame, and his thirſt of conqueſt to the charms, before unknown to him, of pacific virtues.

The repoſe of Voltaire was ſoon diſturbed by the publication of the Maid of Orleans. This poem, in which li-

centiousness and philosophy are combined, and truth assumes the mask of satiric and voluptuous humour, was begun about the year 1730, but had never been finished. The author had intrusted what he had written of it only to a few of his friends, and to some princes. The rumour of its existence had brought down menace on him; and, by not finishing it, he took the surest means to avoid the dangerous temptation of making it public. Copies unfortunately got abroad, one of which fell into inimical and selfish hands, and the work appeared not only with such defects as the author had left, but with lines added by the editors full of gross-

nefs and ill tafte, and with fatiric traits which might endanger the fafety of Voltaire. The defire of gain, the pleafure of attributing their own wretched verfes to a great poet, and the more malignant pleafure of expofing him to perfecution, were the motives of this act of infidelity, the honour of which was divided between la Beaumelle and the Ex Capuchin Maubert.

They fucceeded only fo far as to trouble that repofe for a moment which they wifhed to deftroy. His friends evaded the perfecution, by proving the work to be fpurious, and the hatred

of

of the editors ferved him whom it meant to wound.

This, however, obliged Voltaire to finifh the poem, and prefent a work to the world, at which the author of Mahomet and the age of Louis XIV. need not blufh. The work excited lively feelings of enthufiafm in a numerous clafs of readers, while the foes of Voltaire affected to decry it as unworthy of a philofopher, and almoft as a blemifh on the writings and the life of a poet.

But, if it be ufeful to render fuperftition ridiculous in the eyes of

men addicted to voluptuoufnefs, and by the very weaknefs which hurries them into diffipation deftined fome time to become the unfortunate victims or the dangerous tools of this vile tyrant of men, if affectation of aufterity in manners, if the exceffive value attached to their purity, be ferviceable only to hypocrites who, wearing the mafk of chaftity, may neglect every other virtue, and caft a facred viel over the moft pernicious vices of fociety, fuch as intolerance and perfecution, if accuftoming the world to regard thofe errors from which men of honour and confcience are not exempt as crimes, the power of that dangerous fect, who govern

govern and diſturb the world be extended over the pureſt minds by their having excluſively rendered themſelves the interpreters of celeſtial juſtice, we ſhall then only behold in the author of the Maid of Orleans the foe of hypocriſy and ſuperſtition.

Voltaire himſelf, when ſpeaking of la Fontaine, has well remarked that works, in which voluptuouſneſs and humour are mingled, amuſe without heating or ſeducing the imagination. And if ſuch works be ſources of pleaſure to the fancy, which lighten the uneaſy moments of life, diminiſhed the misfortunes of privation, unbend a mind

fatigued by labour, and fill up moments in which the weary and ſunken ſoul can neither act nor meditate with effect, wherefore rob men of an aid which nature preſents? What will be the effect of ſuch reading? No other than that of diſpoſing men to more mildneſs and indulgence. It was not ſuch books that Gérard or Clement read; or that the ſcouts of Cromwell carried in the pommels of their ſaddles.

Two works very different in themſelves appeared at the ſame epoch: the poem on Natural Law, and the poem of the Deſtruction of Liſbon. To diſplay morals, the principles of which

reaſon

reafon teaches all men, which are fanctioned by their hearts, and which remorfe informs them it is their duty to practice; to fhew that thefe are the principles which God, the common father of men, alone could impart, fince they alone are uniform; to prove that the duty of individuals is mutually to pardon their miftakes, and that of fovereigns to prevent the pernicious tendency of thofe vain opinions which fanaticifm and hypocrify fupport, by wifely treating them all with indifference; fuch is the purport of the poem on Natural Law.

This work, the fineft which man ever confecrated to the Deity, excited

the anger of the devotees, who called it the poem of Natural Religion; though religion is only mentioned in order to oppofe intolerance, and though there is no fuch a thing as natural religion. It was burnt by the parliament of Paris, which began to be terrified, as well at the progrefs of reafon as at that of Molinifm. Under the conduct, at this period, of men who were either blinded by pride or falfe policy, it imagined it would be more eafy to impede the advancement of knowledge than to merit the applaufe of the enlightened. It felt not the want itfelf had of the good opinion of the public; it mifconftrued thofe who were to be

its

its guides, and declared itſelf the enemy of men letters, at that preciſe moment when the ſuffrage of theſe men in France, and even over all Europe, began to acquire influence.

However the poem of Voltaire, which has ſince been commented on in various celebrated books, is ſtill that in which the connexion between morality and the being of a God is moſt clearly demonſtrated. Thirty years later and the book which was burnt as impious would almoſt have appeared a work of religion.

In the poem on the Deſtruction of Liſbon, Voltaire indulged thoſe ſentiments

ments of terror and melancholy which this dreadful accident inſpired. He led the tranquil ſect of Optimiſts amid theſe fearful ruins, combated their cold and puerile doctrine with the indignation of a philoſopher deeply ſenſible of the ſufferings of mankind, expoſed the difficulties on the origin of evil in their full force, and avowed it is impoſſible for them to be ſolved by man.

This poem, in which at the age of more than ſixty the mind of Voltaire, warmed by a love of humanity, diſplays all the ſtrength and fire of youth, was not the only work in which he

oppoſed

oppofed Optimifm. He publifhed Candide, the firft of philofophic romances; which fpecies of writing he brought from England, and added to its perfection. It is a kind of compofition which appears eafy of execution, but it requires an uncommon talent; that of expreffing by a jeft, a flight of the fancy, or by the incidents of the romance, the refult of profound philofophy, without ceafing to be natural, pleafing, and accurate. Hence it is neceffary to felect fuch effects as need neither developement nor proof, and at once to avoid common place unworthy of repetition, and abftraction which is too deep or too new, and which is

not

not adapted to the multitude: that is, it is neceſſary to be, without appearing to be, a philoſopher.

We may add, few books of philoſophy are more uſeful. Such romances are read by frivolous men, whom the very name of philoſopher diſguſts or renders gloomy, and who, however, it is requiſite ſhould be freed from prejudice, and made the opponents of the herd who are intereſted in its defence. The human race would be condemned to eternal error if, to free them from it, it were neceſſary to ſtudy and underſtand the proofs of truth. Fortunately the native intelligence of the

the mind is ſufficient for the comprehending of thoſe ſimple truths which are the moſt eſſential. It is therefore ſufficient to diſcover ſome means of fixing the attention of the indolent, and of engraving theſe truths in their memory; and this is the great uſe of philoſophic romances, and the merit of thoſe in which Voltaire has alike ſurpaſſed his imitators and his models.

Candide was ſoon followed by a free tranſlation of the book of Eccleſiaſtes, and a part of the ſong of Solomon.

Madame de Pompadour had been perſuaded that it would be profoundly politic

politic for her to aſſume the maſk of devotion, by which ſhe might ſhield herſelf from the ſcruples and inconſtancy of the king; and at the ſame time calm the hatred of the people. She wiſhed to make Voltaire an actor in this farce. The duke de la Valiere propoſed to him to tranſlate the Pſalms, the book of Proverbs, Solomon's ſong, and the Eccleſiaſtes. The edition was to have been printed at the Louvre, and the author to have returned to Paris under the protection of the religious favorite. But Voltaire could not act the hypocrite, not even to be made a cardinal, ſome hopes of which were given him about this time. Such propoſals

propoſals generally come too late; and were they made in time the policy of them would not be very certain. He who muſt be a dangerous enemy might become a ſtill more dangerous ally. Let us ſuppoſe Calvin or Luther called to the purple, when they might have accepted the dignity without diſgrace, and let us imagine what would have been the conſequence. The baubles of vanity do not ſatiate ſouls impelled by the ambition of reigning over the minds of men; they do but ſupply new arms.

Voltaire, however, was tempted to make eſſays in tranſlation; not to re-

cover his religious repute, but to exercise himself in another species of composition. When they appeared, the devout imagined he only had intended to parody that which he had translated, and exclaimed it was shameful. They did not imagine that Voltaire had softened and purified the text; that his Ecclesiastes had less of the doctrine of materialism than the original; and that his song of songs was less indecent than the sacred text. These works were therefore once more burnt, for which Voltaire avenged himself by a satiric and humourous letter, in which he mocked at the hypocrisy of morals, the peculiar vice of the modern nations

of Europe, which has contributed more than is imagined to deſtroy that energy of character by which the anci-ents were diſtinguiſhed.

In 1757, the firſt edition of his works, actually made under his own inſpection, was printed. He reviſed it with rigorous attention, ſelected ſome of his numerous fugitive pieces with ſeverity, but with judgment, and added his immortal Eſſay on the Man-ners and Spirit of Nations.

Voltaire had long complained that among the moderns eſpecially, the hiſtory of a country was that of its

kings, or its chiefs; that it ſpoke only of wars, treaties, and civil commotions; and that the hiſtory of morals, arts, ſciences, legiſlation, and political government, had been almoſt forgotten. Thoſe very ancients in whoſe writings we find moſt of morals, and internal politics, have only in general added, to the hiſtory of wars, that of popular factions. We imagine, while we read ſuch hiſtorians, that the human race was created only to exhibit the political or military talents of a few individuals; and that the object of ſociety is not the happineſs of the ſpecies, but the pleaſure of having revolutions to read, or to relate.

Voltaire formed the plan of a hiſtory which ſhould contain all that was moſt important for men to know: ſuch as the effects produced on the peace and happineſs of nations, their prejudices, knowledge, virtues, and vices, and the cuſtoms and the arts of different ages.

He choſe the period from Charlemagne to the preſent century; but, not confining himſelf ſolely to European nations, he intereſted and inſtructed the reader by an abridged retroſpect of the ſtate of the other parts of the globe; the revolutions they had undergone,

and the opinions by which they had been governed.

It was to reconcile Madame du Chatelet to the ſtudy of hiſtory, that he had undertaken this immenſe labour, which obliged him to read books of erudition, ſuch as would have been ſuppoſed incompatible with the liveli-neſs of his fancy, and the activity of his mind. The ſuppoſition that he ſhould ſerve the human race ſupported him, and erudition was not dull to a man who, having the ſagacity to detect and amuſe himſelf with the ridiculous, found an inexhauſtible ſource of this

in

in the ſpeculative or practical doctrines of our anceſtors; and in the follies of thoſe who have tranſmitted or commented on them, while admiring them either with ſincerity or hypocriſy equally laughable.

Such a work could pleaſe none but philoſophers. It was accuſed of being frivolous, becauſe it was clear, and read without labour; and of being inaccurate, becauſe there are ſome errors of names and dates diſcoverable in it, which in themſelves are things abſolutely indifferent. Yet it has been proved, by the very reproaches of his bittereſt critics, that, in a hiſtory ſo

extenſive, no writer was ever more exact. He was often taxed with partiality, becauſe he exclaimed againſt thoſe prejudices which puſillanimity or meanneſs had too long reſpected; and it is eaſy to ſhew that, far from exaggerating the crimes of ſacerdotal deſpotiſm, he has rather diminiſhed their number, and ſoftened their atrocity. In fine, it was taken amiſs that, in a picture of the wickedneſs and folly of man, he has ſometimes indulged in ſtrokes of pleaſantry; and that he has not always ſpoken ſeriouſly of human extravagance; as if that which is often dangerous ceaſed therefore to be abſurd.

These

Thefe prejudices, which it was the intereft of powerful bodies to diffeminate, are not yet eradicated. The habit of generally feeing dulnefs and precifion combined, and, by the fide of critical decifion of finding the infipid fcaffolding on which it was reared, has given birth to the other habit of thinking nothing accurate which is not pedantic. We are accuftomed to fee gloomy ftupidity accompany hiftorical precifion; as we fee men of certain profeffions always clothed in black. But men of genius derive no fatisfaction from a merit which fools can claim as eafily as themfelves; and this merit they are fuppofed not to poffefs, becaufe

they

they alône forbear to vaunt of it. *The Travels of the young Anacharsis* will perhaps efface this too commonly received opinion.

But the essay of Voltaire will ever remain, to men of reason, a work delightful by the choice of its materials, by the rapidity of its style, by that love of truth and humanity which is conspicuous in every page, and by the art of presenting contrasted pictures, and unexpected similarities, without ceasing to be easy and natural; as well as by deducing, in language ever simple, grand consequences, and making profound reflections. The author has not

not given the hiſtory of ages, but that which we wiſh to remember of hiſtory; that which the mind delights to recollect.

Few books would be more uſeful, in a rational plan of education. While we read the facts, we here are taught the art of judging them truly, of exerciſing the native independence of the mind, without which man is but the ſervile inſtrument of prejudice, and of contemning ſuperſtition, fearing fanaticiſm, deteſting intolerance, and hating tyranny, without ceaſing to love peace, and that mildneſs of manners which is as neceſſary to the happineſs

of

of mankind as is the wiſdom of legiſlation itſelf.

Hitherto, in private or public education, which alike are guided by prejudice, youth have ſtudied hiſtory as disfigured by vile or ſuperſtitious compilers; and though, ſince the publication of the eſſay of Voltaire, two men, the Abbé de Condillac and the Abbé Millot, have merited not to be numbered in this claſs, yet, reſtrained by their ſituation, they have left the reader too much to divine: in order to underſtand them, we ought not to have any need of their inſtruction.

This work placed Voltaire in the claſs of original hiſtorians; and he has the honour of having effected a revolution in the manner of writing hiſtory, by which England indeed has hitherto only profited. Hume, Robertſon, Gibbon, and Watſon, may, in ſome reſpects, be conſidered as his ſcholars. The hiſtory of Voltaire has another advantage: which is, that it may be taught in England as well as in Ruſſia, and in Virginia as conſiſtently as at Bern or Venice. He has inſerted none but ſuch truths as every ſpecies of government may adopt. He only requires that human reaſon ſhould have the right of improving itſelf; that the citizen ſhould

enjoy

enjoy his natural freedom; and that the laws ſhould be mild and the religion tolerant. He addreſſes himſelf to all mankind; and ſays nothing which may not enlighten them all, without offence to any of thoſe opinions which are ſo connected with the conſtitution and individual intereſt of a country as not to yield to reaſon, till ſuch time as the deſtruction of more general error ſhall have rendered the approach of truth leſs difficult.

In this edition Voltaire had prefixed to his fugitive pieces of poetry an epiſtle addreſſed to his houſe of the *Delices*; or, rather, it was an ode to liberty, and

and fufficed to anfwer thofe who, in the height of their ariftocratic zeal, had accufed him of being the enemy of liberty. In thefe pieces, in which refined gaiety, delicate feeling, and gallantry fucceffively appear, Voltaire fought not to be a poet; yet every fpecies of poetic beauty flowed from his pen when he thought not of them; he did not endeavour to difplay philofophy, yet throughout the whole is to be found whatever is fuited to the fubject, to the fituation, and the characters. In fuch poetic effufions, as in romances, the philofophy of the work fhould appear lefs extenfive than the philofophy of the author. It is with

thefe

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these writings as with elementary books which cannot be well written if the author's knowledge does not embrace more than that which they contain; and therefore, although these works are regarded as frivolous, those of them which stand in the first rank are produced only by men of a superior mind.

This same year was the epoch of a reconciliation between Voltaire and his royal disciple; the Austrians, already in the heart of Silesia, were on the point of completing the conquest of it; a French army was on the frontiers of Brandenbourgh; the Russians, masters of Prussia, threatened to over-

run

run Pomerania and the marches. The Pruſſian monarchy ſeemed to be annihilated; and the prince, who had been the author of its ſplendour, appeared to have no other reſource than to inter himſelf beneath its ruins, and to preſerve his glory by periſhing in the moment of a victory.

The Margraveſs of Bareith tenderly loved her brother, the deſtruction of her houſe afflicted her, ſhe ſaw how greatly France oppoſed her own intereſts while ſhe laviſhed her blood and treaſures to ſecure the ſovereignty of Germany to the houſe of Auſtria; but the French miniſter had ſuffered from

a verſe of the King of Pruſſia, nor could the Marchioneſs de Pompadour pardon his having feigned an ignorance of her political exiſtence, and care had been taken to ſend to her alſo ſome verſes which had fallen into the hand of the miniſter of the Elector of Saxony, through the treachery of a perſon employed to copy them. However there was a neceſſity of negociating with enemies, embittered by perſonal inſults, and at the very moment in which they thought themſelves ſecure of an eaſy victory. The margraveſs had recourſe to Voltaire, who addreſſed himſelf to the Cardinal de Tençin, knowing that this miniſter,

forgotten ſince the death of Fleury who employed while he deſpiſed him, had preſerved a private correſpondence with the king. Tençin wrote; but the only anſwer he received was the order of the miniſter for foreign affairs to reject the negociation by a letter, of which they had even ſent him a copy. The aged politician, who would not formerly invite Voltaire to his table in deference to the court, could not baniſh his chagrin when he found that he had offended the court by his complaiſance to Voltaire; and it ſhortened his days. In his youth, more perilous adventures had only ſerved to animate his talent for intrigue, becauſe then hope ſuſtain-

ed him, and he was among the number of men who find in power and rank a confolation for fhame; but, in this affair, he beheld the laft thread deftroyed which connected him with royal power.

Voltaire commenced another negociation, through the medium of the Marechal de Richelieu, but it was equally fruitlefs. A third, fome years latter, was fo far fuccefsful as to obtain the confent of M. de Choifeul to receive a fecret envoy from the King of Pruffia. This envoy was difcovered by the agents of the emprefs queen, and either through the inconftancy of the French minifter, or that M. de Choifeul had

had acted without consulting Madame de Pompadour, he was arrested and his papers searched : a violation of the law of nations which is forgotten in the multitude of inferior crimes which politicians commit without remorse.

During this period, so dangerous and so glorious to the King of Prussia, Voltaire appeared at one time to reassume his former influence over the monarch, at another to preserve nothing but the remembrance of the affair of Frankfort; and it was then that he wrote those remarkable Memoirs*

* We have added them as an appendix to this life.

in which neither good humour nor juſtice are loſt in the lively recollection of a juſt reſentment. Voltaire had nobly condemned them to oblivion: chance preſerved them to avenge genius for the outrages of power.

The Margraveſs of Bareith died in the midſt of the war. The King of Pruſſia wrote to Voltaire, and requeſted him to confer an immortality on the name of his ſiſter, of which her mild and amiable virtues, her ſoul equally ſuperior to prejudices, to grandeur, and misfortune, had rendered her worthy. The ode, which Voltaire conſecrated to her memory, breathes a ſoft ſenſibility,

lity, and a simple interesting philoso-
phy. This species of composition is
one of those in which he was the least
successful, because it requires a degree
of perfection which he could never re-
solve to aim at in trifling works, and
because his reason could not yield at
pleasure to that enthusiasm which is
said to be the characteristic of the ode.
The odes of Voltaire are only fugitive
pieces, in which we find the great and
philosophic poet, but in which we per-
ceive him embarrassed and constrained
by a form which ill agreed with the
fire of his genius. However, it must
be owned that his verses addressed to a

princess on gaming, and, still more, the charming stanzas on old age:

*Si vous voulez que j'aime encore, &c.**

are Anacreontic odes, much superior to those of Horace, who nevertheless has, at least in the opinion of people of a somewhat modern taste, surpassed his model.

France, so superior to other nations in tragedy and comedy, has not been equally happy in lyric poets. The odes of Rousseau scarcely present us with any thing more than a seductive and harmonious poetry, which is void of ideas or filled with false thoughts.

* If you wish that I still should love you, &c.

La

La Motte, more ingenious, was yet a ſtranger to the harmony and the graces of ſtyle; and we ſcarcely cite the verſes of any other poet.

Voltaire was ſtill at Berlin when Diderot and d'Alembert formed the deſign of writing the Encyclopedia, and publiſhed the firſt volume of it. A work whoſe object it was to include the truths of all the ſciences, and to trace the lines of communication between them, undertaken by two men who joined much wit and a free daring philoſophy to extenſive and profound knowledge, appeared to the penetrating eye of Voltaire the moſt formidable

midable ſtroke that could be aimed at ignorance and prejudice. The Encyclopedia became the book of all men who wiſhed to inſtruct themſelves, but particularly of thoſe who, without being habitually employed in cultivating their mind, yet are deſirous of the power of acquiring a ready information on every object which excites in them either a tranſient or durable intereſt. It was a maſs to which thoſe, who had not time to form ideas for themſelves, might have recourſe for the ideas of the moſt enlightened and celebrated writers; in which, in ſhort, the errors, that are reſpected by prejudice, would either be betrayed by the weak-

neſs

neſs of their proofs, or ſhaken by the near neighbourhood of truths which ſap their foundations.

Voltaire, having retired to Ferney, gave a ſmall number of literary articles to the Encyclopedia; he prepared ſome of thoſe on philoſophic ſubjects, but with leſs zeal, becauſe he felt that the editors had leſs need of his aſſiſtance there, and becauſe that, in general, though his great works in verſe had been formed to conſtitute his glory, he had ſcarcely ever written in proſe but with views of univerſal utility. Mean while, the ſame reaſons which intereſted Voltaire for the progreſs of the

the Encyclopedia raifed that work innumerable enemies. Compofed or applauded by the greateft men of the nation, it became a fpecies of line which feparated the moft diftinguifhed literati, and thofe who had the honour of being their difciples or their friends, from that crowd of obfcure and jealous writers, who, in the forrowful incapacity of giving either new truths or new pleafures to the world, hate and calumniate men to whom nature has been more bountiful.

A work in which it was neceffary to treat freely and boldly of divinity, of morality, of jurifprudence, of legiflation,

tion, and of public economy, could not but terrify all religious or political parties, and all the ſubordinate powers which feared to ſee their pretenſions and utility diſcuſſed. The inſurrection was general. The journal of Trévoux, the eccleſiaſtic gazette, the ſatiric journals, the Jeſuiſts and the Janſeniſts, the clergy, the parliaments, all, without ceaſing to hate or oppoſe each other, united againſt the Encyclopedia, and it fell. The editors were obliged to finiſh and to print, in ſecret this work, to whoſe perfection liberty and publicity were ſo eſſential; and one of the nobleſt undertakings which the human mind has ever conceived, would

would have remained unfiniſhed but for the courage of Diderot, and the zeal of a great number of men of diſtinguiſhed learning, whom perſecution could not deter.

Happily, the honour of having given the Encyclopedia to Europe, compenſated France for the ſhame of having oppoſed its progreſs. It was, with juſtice, regarded as the work of the nation, and its perſecution as that of a policy and jealouſy equally deſpicable.

But the conteſts which the Encyclopedia had occaſioned did not ceaſe with the proſcription of that work.

Its

Its principal authors and their friends, marked by the name of *philosophers* and *Encyclopedists*, which was designed as an approbrium by the enemies of reason, were compelled to unite even by this very persecution, and Voltaire naturally became their leader by his age, his celebrity, his zeal, and his genius. He had long before enjoyed some friends and a great number of admirers; at that period, he had a party. The persecution rallied, under his standard all the men of merit, whom, perhaps, his superiority would have kept at a distance from him, as it had banished their predecessors; and enthusiasm took the place of former injustice.

It

It was in the year 1760 that this literary war was moſt violent. Le Franc de Pompignan, an eſtimable man of letters but an indifferent poet, of whoſe works there remain a fine ſtanza, and a feeble tragedy in which the combined genius of Virgil and Metaſtaſio could not yield him ſufficient ſupport, was elected one of the French academy. Cloathed with the honours of magiſtracy, he thought that his dignity, as well as his works, exempted him from all gratitude; in the diſcourſe, which he delivered at his admiſſion, he permitted himſelf to inſult the men whoſe names did the greateſt honour to the ſociety that condeſcended to receive him;

him; and, clearly pointing out Voltaire, accuſed him of infidelity and falſhood. Soon after, Paliſſot, the venal inſtrument of the rancour of a woman, exhibited the philoſophers on the ſtage. The laws, which prohibit the ridiculing individuals at the theatre, were ſilent. The magiſtrates betrayed their duty, and ſaw, with a malignant joy, men, whoſe knowledge and influence on public opinion they dreaded, immolated in the ſcene, without recollecting that while they opened the way to ſatire they expoſed themſelves to its ſhafts. Crébillon diſgraced his old age, by approving the piece. The duke de Choiſeul, then the favourite

miniſter, countenanced this indignity, through a weak complaiſance to the ſame woman, of whoſe reſentment Paliſſot was the inſtrument. The journals repeated the inſults of the theatre. Still Voltaire combated all. The Poor Devil, the Ruffian at Paris, Vanity, a crowd of humourous pieces in proſe ſucceeded each other with aſtoniſhing rapidity.

Le Franc de Pompignan complained to the king, and to the academy, and beheld, with an impotent grief, that his own name was obſcured by the ſplendour of that of Voltaire. Each ſtep he took

took did but increaſe the ſatire, which every tongue repeated, and the verſes in which he is conſigned to eternal ridicule. He made a formal propoſal to an auguſt patron, to break a promiſe which he had made to this patron himſelf, by returning to the academy, to vote for a man, in whoſe behalf the prince was intereſted. He received, in return for this ſacrifice, a polite refuſal, and had the mortification to hear his patron himſelf repeat, as he withdrew, the lines ſo terrible to him:

*Et l'ami Pompignan penſe être quelque choſe**!

* What, does friend Pompignan think himſelf ſomebody!

and he retired to bury his humbled pride and deceived ambition in the country: a fearful, but ſalutary, example of the power of genius and the dangers of literary hypocriſy.

Fréron, an ex-jeſuit as well as Deſfontaines, had ſucceeded the latter in the trade of flattering, by periodical ſatires, the jealouſy of the enemies of virtue, of reaſon, and of talents. He diſtinguiſhed himſelf in the war againſt the philoſophers. Voltaire, who had long ſupported his outrages, at length did juſtice, and avenged his friends. In the comedy of *l'Ecoſſaiſe* (the Scotchwoman), he introduced a depraved

 journaliſt,

journaliſt, whoſe character was formed of venality and rancour. The pit, in the character, recognized Fréron, who, delivered over to public diſdain in a piece which could not fail to be preſerved to the theatre by intereſting ſcenes, and the original and forcible character of the worthy blunt Freeport, was condemned to bear, during the remainder of his life, a ridiculous and diſgraced name. Fréron, in applauding the inſult offered to the philoſophers, had forfeited his right of complaining; and his protectors choſe rather to abandon him than to avow a partiality which might have involved their own diſcredit.

Other enemies, leſs virulent, had been either corrected or puniſhed; and Voltaire, triumphing in the midſt of theſe victims ſacrificed to reaſon and to his glory, ſent to the theatre, at the age of ſixty-ſix, the *chef-d'œuvre* of Tancred. That tragedy was dedicated to the Marchioneſs de Pompadour. It was the fruit of the addreſs with which Voltaire could, without wounding the Duke de Choiſeul, ſupport the cauſe of the philoſophers, whoſe adverſaries had obtained a ſlight protection from that miniſter. This dedication taught his enemies that their calumnies were not more injurious to his ſecurity than their

their criticifms to his fame: it completed his vengeance.

In this fame year he learned that a young niece of Corneille languifhed in a condition unworthy of his name; "It is the duty of a foldier" he cried, "to fuccour the niece of his general." Mademoifelle Corneille was invited to Ferney; and fhe there received an education fuitable to the rank that her birth had marked for her in fociety. Voltaire even carried his delicacy fo far as not to fuffer the eftablifhment of Mademoifelle Corneille to appear as his benefaction. He wifhed that fhe fhould owe that to the works of her uncle, and

he undertook to publiſh an edition of them with notes. The creator of the French Theatre commented on by the writer who had conducted that theatre to its perfection, a man of genius, born at a time when taſte was not yet formed, judged by a rival who joined to genius the gift, almoſt as rare, of a taſte that was penetrating without ſeverity, delicate without timidity, and enlightened by a long and happy experience of the art, theſe are the beauties preſented in that work. Voltaire ſpeaks in it of Corneille's defects with frankneſs, of his beauties with enthuſiaſm. Never has Corneille been examined with ſuch rigour, never has he been

been praiſed with a feeling more profound and true. Reſolved to inſtruct both the French youth and the youth of other countries who cultivate the French literature, he did not pardon the vices of language, the extravagance, nor the offences committed againſt delicacy and good taſte, which are found in Corneille; but, at the ſame time, he taught them to know the progreſs which the art owes to that writer, the uncommon elevation of his mind, the almoſt inimitable beauty of his poetry in the morcels dictated by his genius, and thoſe vaſt, ſublime, words which ſpring ſuddenly from the neceſſity of the

the occaſion, and paint great characters with a ſingle ſtroke.

The herd of writers reproached him, nevertheleſs, with a deſign of degrading Corneille, from motives of mean jealouſy; whereas, throughout the whole of his commentary, he ſeizes, he even ſeems to ſeek, occaſion to proclaim his admiration of Racine; a more dangerous rival, whom he has ſurpaſſed only in ſome parts of the tragic art, and whoſe prodigious excellence he might well envy in the height of his glory.

Voltaire, tranquil in his retreat, employed in continuing the happy war which

which he had declared againſt preju-
dice ſaw the arrival of an unfortunate
family, the father of which had been
conducted to the wheel by fanatic
judges; the inſtruments of the ferocious
paſſions of a ſuperſtitious people. He
learnt that Calas, an infirm old man,
had been accuſed of having hanged
his young and vigorous ſon, in the
midſt of his family, and in the preſence
of a catholic ſervant; that he had been
urged to commit this crime by the fear
of ſeeing this ſon embrace the catholic
religion, this ſon who ſpent his life in
diſſipation, and of whom no one in the
midſt of the univerſal effervеſcence
could ever cite a ſingle word, or point

to

to a ſingle action which announced ſuch a deſign, while another ſon of Calas already converted to the catholic faith enjoyed a penſion from the bounty of this father, who was far from poſſeſſing affluence. Never, in an event of ſuch a nature, had circumſtances ſo concurred to baniſh the ſuſpicion of a crime in the father, or to ſtrengthen the reaſons to aſcribe ſuicide to the ſon. The young man's conduct, his character, the kind of reading in which he indulged, all confirmed this idea. Yet a magiſtrate, whoſe weak mind was intoxicated with ſuperſtition, and whoſe hatred to the proteſtants did not heſitate to impute crimes to them, cauſed the

the whole family to be impriſoned. The catholic populace became enflamed, and the young man was declared a martyr. The fraternity of the penitents, which, to the diſgrace of the nation, ſtill exiſts at Thoulouſe, performed a ſolemn maſs for him, during which they bore his effigies, holding the palm of martyrdom in one hand, and in the other the pen with which he was to have ſigned his abjuration.

It was ſoon reported that the proteſtant religion commanded fathers to aſſaſſinate their children, when they deſigned to abjure it; and that, for greater ſecurity, they elected, in their ſecret

ſecret aſſemblies the butcher of the ſect.
The inferior tribunal, led by the furious
M. David, pronounced the unfortunate
Calas guilty; and the parliament confirmed
the ſentence by that very ſmall
majority which is unhappily regarded as
ſufficient by our abſurd juriſprudence.
Condemned to the torture and the
wheel, this miſerable father died proteſting
his innocence; and the judges
abſolved his family, the neceſſary accomplices
of the guilt, or the innocence
of its head.

This family, ruined and ſtained by
prejudice, went to ſeek, among men
of their own perſuaſion, a retreat, aſſiſt-

ance,

ance, but, above all, confolation. They took up their refidence near Geneva. Voltaire, whofe compaffion was moved, and whofe indignation was roufed, informed himfelf of the horrible particulars; and, affured of the innocence of the unfortunate Calas, he dared to conceive the hope of obtaining juftice. The zeal of the advocates was excited, and their courage fuftained by his letters. He interefted, in the caufe of humanity, the naturally fufceptible mind of the Duke de Choifeul. The reputation of Tronchin had brought to Geneva the Duchefs d'Enville, the great grand-daughter of the author of the Maxims. Superior to fuperftition, both

both by her native feelings and by her acquired knowledge, informed how to produce the welfare of mankind by equal activity and courage, and embellishing by a genuine modesty the energy of her virtues, her hatred of fanaticism and oppression insured to Calas a protectress, whose zeal could not be abated by obstacles or delays. The process was commenced. To the memorials of the advocates, too profuse and declamatory, Voltaire added more nervous writings, the style of which was seductive, and calculated in some places to excite pity, and in others to awaken the public indignation, so prone to sleep among a people, at that time,

time, too much a ſtranger to their own intereſts. Pleading for Calas, he ſupported the cauſe of toleration; which word it was then daring to pronounce, and which is even now rejected with contempt by men who recognize the right of enſlaving thought and conſcience. Letters, abounding with that ſubtle praiſe which he could diſtribute with ſuch delicacy, animated the zeal of the defenders of the cauſe, of its protectors, and of the judges. It was, while he promiſed immortality, that he demanded juſtice.

The ſentence of Thouloufe was annulled. The Duke de Choiſeul had

the wiſdom and the courage to order a tribunal of Maſters of requeſts to reviſe this cauſe, in defending which the parliaments were all intereſted, whoſe prejudices and ſpirit of mutual defence left little hope of an equitable deciſion. In fine, Calas was declared innocent; diſhonour was removed from his memory; and a generous miniſter cauſed the public treaſury to repair the wrongs that the injuſtice of the judges had done to the fortune of this family, which was as reſpectable as it was unhappy. But he did not proceed ſo far as to compel the parliament of Languedoc to acknowledge the arret which overturned an act of its injuſtice. That

tribunal preferred the miſerable vanity of perſevering in its error, to the honour of lamenting, and repairing, the injury.

Mean while, the applauſes of France and of Europe were heard at Thouloufe, and the unhappy M. *David*, ſinking beneath the weight of remorſe and of ſhame, ſoon loſt his reaſon and his life. This affair, ſo great in itſelf, ſo important in its conſequences, ſince it turned the attention not only of France but of other nations to the crimes of intolerance and the neceſſity of preventing them, this affair occupied the ſoul of Voltaire, during more than

three years.—" In all this time," ſaid he, " a ſmile has not eſcaped me, for which I have not reproached myſelf, as for a crime." His name, which had long been dear to the enlightened friends of humanity as that of its moſt zealous, moſt indefatigable defender, this name was then bleſt by that multitude of citizens who, devoted to perſecution during eighty years, at length heard a voice raiſed in their defence. Having returned to Paris in 1778, one day that the people ſurrounded him on the *Pont Royal*, a poor woman was aſked who that man was who thus drew the crowd after him——" Know you not," ſaid ſhe, " that he is the ſaviour of Calas ?"

He

He was informed of this anſwer, and, ſurrounded as he was by the marks of admiration which were laviſhed on him, it was this by which he was moſt ſenſibly affected.

Shortly after the unfortunate death of Calas, a young woman of the ſame province, who, according to a barbarous cuſtom, had been taken from her parents and ſhut up in a convent with a deſign of aiding ſaving grace by human means, wearied of the ill treatment that ſhe had endured, eſcaped, and her body was diſcovered in a well. The prieſt who had ſolicited the *Lettre de Cachet*, the ſiſterhood who had uſed

with barbarity the power which it gave them over this unfortunate young woman, doubtlefs merited punifhment; but it was on the family of this victim that fanaticifm wifhed punifhment to fall. The injurious reproach which had conducted Calas to the wheel was revived with a new fury. Sirven, fortunately, had time to fly; and, condemned to death for contumacy, he fought an afylum with the protector of Calas. But his wife, who accompanied him, fell a prey to her grief and to the fatigue of a journey, undertaken on foot, over tracts of fnow.

Judicial forms required Sirven to prefent himfelf before the fame parliament

ment who had ſhed the blood of Calas. Voltaire endeavoured to obtain other judges. The Duke de Choiſeul at that time thought it neceſſary to reſpect the opinion of the parliaments who, after the decay of his influence over the Marchioneſs de Pompadour, and again after her death, were become uſeful to him, at times to free him from an enemy, and at others to afford the means of rendering himſelf neceſſary by the art with which he could appeaſe their commotions, which he himſelf frequently excited.

Sirven, then, was compelled to yield to neceſſity, and to appear before the

 tribunal

tribunal of Thoulouse; but Voltaire knew how to provide for his security, and to prepare for his success. He had disciples in the parliament; some able advocates of Thoulouse wished to partake of the glory which those of Paris had acquired by defending Calas; the friends of toleration were become powerful even in this very city: within a few years Voltaire's works had changed the minds of men; they had only pitied Calas with a silent horror, Sirven found declared protectors, for which he was indebted to the eloquence of Voltaire, to the talent of opportunely infusing truth, mingled with approbation, into the feelings of those whom he designed

to

to work his purpofes. The friends of truth triumphed over the abettors of the penitents, and Sirven was faved.

The Jefuits had ufurped the poffeffions of a well defcended family, who, by their poverty, were prevented from recovering their rights. Voltaire gave them the means of accomplifhing that; and oppreffors of every kind, who, long had feared his writings, now learnt to dread his activity, his generofity, and his courage.

This laft event almoft immediately preceded the deftruction of the Jefuits. Voltaire, educated among them,

had

had maintained a correſpondence with his former maſters. While they were living they reſtrained the fury of the fraternity from any open attack, and Voltaire was reſpectful to the Jeſuits, both in deference to the connections of his youth, and alſo to preſerve allies in in the party which at that time governed the devotees. But, after the death of theſe friends, wearied by the clamours of the Journal de Trévoux, which, by unceaſing accuſations of impiety ſeemed to call down perſecutions on his head, he no longer preſerved the ſame reſpect for the Jeſuits, nor did his zeal for the defence of the op-

preſſed

preſſed extend to them, when they, in their turn, became oppreſſed.

He exulted in the deſtruction of an order, the friend of letters but the enemy of reaſon, which was deſirous of deſtroying all talents or of drawing them into its boſom, to corrupt them, by employing them to ſerve its deſigns, and to hold the human race in infancy, in order to govern them. Yet he pitied individuals treated with barbarity by the hatred of the Janſeniſts; and he gave an aſylum, in his own houſe, to a Jeſuit, to point out to the devotees that true humanity knows only misfortune and forgets opinions. Father

ther Adam, to whom a ſort of celebrity was given by his abode at Ferney, was not abſolutely uſeleſs to his hoſt. He played with him at cheſs, and he played the game with ſufficient addreſs ſometimes to conceal his ſuperiority. He alſo ſpared Voltaire labour in his learned reſearches; he even ſerved him as an almoner, for Voltaire wiſhed to oppoſe his fidelity in fulfilling the exterior duties of the Romiſh religion to the accuſations, which were brought againſt him, of impiety.

At this period a great revolution was engendering in the human mind. Since the revival of philoſophy, religion,

gion, exclufively eftablifhed throughout Europe, had been attacked only in England. Leibnitz, Fontenelle, and other lefs celebrated philofophers, accufed of free-thinking, had refpected religion in their writings. Bayle, himfelf, by a precaution that was neceffary to his fafety, while he indulged himfelf in all objections, affumed the air of wifhing to prove that revelation alone could refolve them, and of having formed the project of exalting faith by humiliating reafon. In England, thefe attacks had little fuccefs or effect. The moft powerful party in that nation judged it ufeful to themfelves to leave the people in darknefs,

probably

probably becaufe the habit of adoring the myfteries of the Bible ftrengthened their faith in thofe of the conftitution; and they honoured the eftablifhed religion as a fpecies of focial advantage. Befide, in a country where the Houfe of Commons alone led to fortune, and where the members of that houfe were tumultuoufly elected by the people, an apparent refpect for their opinions muft neceffarily be erected into a virtue by all the ambitious.

In France, there had appeared fome bold writers, but the blows which they aimed were ftill indirect. Even the work of Helvetius de l'Efprit (on the under-

underſtanding) was only an attack on religious principles in general; it queſtioned the foundations of all religions, and left the reader to draw conſequences and make applications. Emilius appeared; the Savoyard vicar's Profeſſion of Faith contained nothing relative to the utility, toward morals, of the belief of a God, and the inutility of revelation, which is not to be found in the poem of Natural Law; but the attack was open and the perſons attacked were brought upon the ſtage under their proper name and character, and not under that of the prieſts of India or of Thibet. This boldneſs aſtoniſhed Voltaire and excited his emulation.

lation. The ſucceſs of Emilius encouraged him, nor was he terrified by the fear of perſecution. Rouſſeau had not been perſecuted at Paris had he not put his name to the work, nor at Geneva had he not maintained in another part of Emilius that the people poſſeſſed not the power of renouncing the right of reforming a depraved government. This doctrine authoriſed the citizens of that republic to overthrow the ariſtocracy which its magiſtrates had eſtabliſhed, and which ſecured an hereditary authority to certain rich families.

Voltaire believed that he could ſecurely ſhun perſecution by concealing his

his name; and, by a deference to government while he directed all his force againſt religion, could intereſt even the civil power to weaken its empire. A multiplicity of works, in which he ſucceſſively employed argument and humour, were diſperſed throughout Europe, under the various forms which could be invented by the neceſſity of veiling truth, or of rendering it engaging. His zeal againſt religion, which he viewed as the cauſe of the fanaticiſm that had deſolated Europe from the moment of its birth, the cauſe of the ſuperſtition that had degraded it, and as the ſource of the evils, which the enemies of men ſtill

 con-

continued to inflict on them, feemed to increafe his activity and his powers. "I am wearied," faid he one day, "of hearing it repeated that twelve men were fufficient to eftablifh chrifti-anity, and I wifh to prove there needs but one to deftroy it."

An examination of works, which Chriftians regarded as proceeding from infpiration, the anylization of dogmas, which have been fucceffively introduc-ed fince the origin of that religion, the hiftory of the ridiculous or bloody quar-rels which have been excited by thofe, the miracles, prophecies, tales fcattered through legends and ecclefiaftical hif-

tories, the religious wars, the maſſacres ordained in the name of God, the butchers and ſcaffolds which, at the voice of prieſts, covered Europe, the blood of kings flowing from the ſteel of aſſaſins, and the fanaticiſm which unpeopled America, all theſe were inceſſantly repeated in his works under a thouſand varied forms. He excited indignation, he wrung tears from the heart, he exhauſted the ſprings of ridicule. Men trembled at an attrocious action, they laughed at an abſurdity. Voltaire did not fear frequently to place the ſame objects before his readers, to urge the ſame reaſonings to them.—

"They tell me that I repeat the ſame things," he ſaid in one of his writings, "true: I ſhall repeat them till I ſee men reformed."

Theſe works, rigorouſly prohibited in France, in Italy, at Vienna, in Portugal, and in Spain, could not be ſpeedily circulated; all of them could not reach every reader; but there was not an obſcure corner in the provinces, there was not any nation in foreign countries, ſuffering under the yoke of intolerance, which did not feel the influence of ſome of theſe writings.

Men of liberal minds, who exiſted before only in ſome cities where ſcience

was

was cultivated, or among the learned and the great, were, by his voice, multiplied in all claſſes of ſociety as well as in all countries. Soon perceiving their number and their ſtrength they ventured to ſhew themſelves, and Europe was aſtoniſhed to find itſelf a country of Deiſts.

The zeal of Voltaire created him enemies in all thoſe who had obtained, and all who expected to obtain, affluence or even ſubſiſtence from religion. Yet that party no longer poſſeſſed ſuch men as Boſſuet, Arnaud, and Nicole; thoſe who replaced them by their talents and their acquaintance with phi-

losophy and letters had ranged themselves with the contrary party; and the members of the clergy who approached nearest to them in ability, yielding to the desire of not debasing themselves in the opinion of enlightened men, stood aloof or contented themselves with maintaining the political use of a belief which they would have blushed to have partaken with the people, and substituted for the credulous superstition of their predecessors a species of religious *Machiavelism.*

Defamatory writings and attacks sprang up profusely; but Voltaire, by answering alone preserved the name of these

these works, which were read by none but those to whom they were useless, and who were unwilling or unable to understand either the objections or the answers.

To the clamours of fanaticism, Voltaire opposed the protection of monarchs. The Empress of Russia, the Kings of Poland, Denmark, Sweden, and Prussia, interested themselves in his labours, perused his works, sought to deserve his approbation, and sometimes seconded his zeal for the welfare of mankind. In every country the powerful, and such ministers as sought reputation and were intent on spreading

their fame through Europe, were ambitious to enjoy the ſuffrage of the philoſopher of Ferney, confided to him their hopes and fears for the progreſs of reaſon, and their projects for the increaſe of knowledge and the ruin of fanaticiſm. He had formed a league which included all the great men of Europe, of which he was the ſoul, and whoſe cry was, *Reaſon and toleration.* Did any ſtriking injuſtice ariſe in a nation, did Voltaire hear of any act of bigotry, any inſult offered to human nature, his pen expoſed the guilty to Europe: and who knows how often the fear of this ſure and terrible vengeance

geance has withheld the oppreſſor's arm?

But it was in France, more eſpecially, that he exercifed this dominion of reaſon. Since the affair of Calas, every victim, unjuſtly ſacrificed or purſued by the ſword of the law, found in him a protector, or an avenger.

The execution of the Count de Lally excited his indignation. The lawyers of Paris, ſitting in judgement on the conduct of a general in India, a ſentence of death paſſed without proof of a ſingle determinate crime, nay mere ſuſpicion produced as the graveſt accuſation,

cuſation, a judgment pronounced on the teſtimony of declared enemies, on the memorial of a Jeſuit who had compoſed two of them contradictory to each other, uncertain whether he ſhould accuſe the general or his enemies, not knowing which he hated moſt or which it would be moſt convenient to ruin; ſuch proceedings and ſuch a ſentence could not but rouze the feelings of every friend of juſtice, although the calumnies heaped on the head of the unfortunate general and the horrid barbarity of dragging him to death with a gag in his mouth, ſhould not have ſhaken every fibre in every heart which the

habit

habit of difpofing of the lives of men had not turned to ftone.

Yet, Voltaire during a long time fpoke fingly againft this enormity. The vaft number of perfons employed by the Eaft-India Company who were interefted in throwing the fatal confequences of their conduct on a man who no longer exifted, the powerful tribunal which had condemned the general, all thofe whom that body included in its fuite whofe voice was fold to it, the other corps, who, united with that by the fame name, by common functions and like interefts, regarded its caufe as their own, in fine, the adminiftration,

niſtration, aſhamed of the weakneſs or the cruel policy which ſacrificed the Count de Lally to the hope of concealing in his tomb the faults which had loſt India, all ſeemed to oppoſe a tardy juſtice. But Voltaire, by reiterated attacks on the ſame object, triumphed over prejudice and the intereſts of ſuch as are attentive to preſerve and extend its empire. Juſt minds needed only to be informed of the circumſtances; others, he hurried along with him; and when the ſon of the Count de Lally, ſince ſo celebrated by his eloquence and courage, had attained an age at which he could demand juſtice, the minds of men were prepared to applaud the

attempt

attempt and to ſolicit its execution. Voltaire was dying, when, twelve years afterward, this unjuſt ſentence was reverſed; he heard the intelligence; his powers ſprang back to life, and he wrote—"I die content; I ſee the king loves juſtice." The laſt words which were traced by that hand which had ſo long maintained the cauſe of humanity and juſtice.

In the ſame year, 1766, another arret aſtoniſhed Europe; which, while it read the works of our philoſophers, concluded that knowledge was diſſeminated through France, or at leaſt through thoſe claſſes of ſociety whoſe

particular duty it was to inform themselves; and thought that, after a period of more than fifteen years, the brethren of Montesquieu might have had time to comprehend his principles.

The crucifix of wood, placed on the Bridge of Abbeville, was insulted, during the night. The indignation of the people was heightened and kept in action by the ridiculous ceremony of doing penance. The bishop of Amiens, governed in his old age by fanatics, and no longer capable of foreseeing the consequences of this religious farce, added to its solemnity by his presence. Mean time, the malice of a townsman of

of Abbeville directed the fufpicions of the people to the Chevalier de la Barre, a young officer whofe relations were of the long robe and members of the chief magiftracy, and who at that time lived with his kinfwoman the Abbefs de Villancourt, near the gates of Abbeville. A procefs was commenced, and the judges of Abbeville condemned to tortures, whofe horror would difmay the imagination of a canibal, the Chevalier de la Barre and d'Etallonde his friend, who had taken the precaution to fly. The Chevalier de la Barre had awaited the iffue of the trial; he had more to lofe than the other by quitting France; and relied on the protection

of his relations who filled the firſt employments in the parliaments and in the council. His hopes were deceived; the family feared to attract the notice of the public toward this proſecution, inſtead of endeavouring to ſeek ſupport from the general opinion; and, at the age of nearly ſeventeen, the Chevalier de la Barre was condemned, by a majority of two votes, to be beheaded, after having had his tongue cut out, and having undergone the torture.

This horrible ſentence was executed; and yet the accuſations were as ridiculous as the puniſhment was attrocious.

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He was only *vehemently* ſuſpected to have taken a part in the adventure of the crucifix; but he was declared to be convicted of having ſung, in parties of conviviality, ſome of thoſe ſongs which are half obſcene half religious, and which notwithſtanding their groſsneſs amuſe the imagination in the firſt years of youth by the contraſt which they form with the ſcrupulous reſpect which education inſpires toward the ſame objects; of having recited an ode whoſe author was perfectly known and at that time enjoyed a penſion from the king's privy purſe; of having made ſome genuflexions to certain libertine works which were written to the taſte

of a time in which men, led aſtray by religious auſterity, could not diſtinguiſh between pleaſure and debauchery; and in fine, he was reproached with having ſpoken in a language worthy of thoſe ſongs and thoſe books.

Theſe accuſations were all ſupported by the teſtimony of low people who had ſerved theſe young men in their parties of pleaſure, and by the *Tourrières** of convents, who eaſily find cauſe of offence.

This ſentence revolted the minds of all men; no law exiſted which ordain-

* Old women, who are intruſted to be door-keepers.

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ed sentence of death either for the breaking of images or for that species of blasphemy of which the Chevalier de la Barre had been accused; thus the judges had exceeded even the penalties decreed by laws, which no enlightened man can still see sullying our criminal code without horror. There was no father of a family who had not reason to tremble, since there are few young men who escape such-like indiscretions; and the judges had condemned the unfortunate victim to a cruel death for language, in which the greatest part of them had indulged, in their youth, in which, perhaps, they still indulged, and whose children were as

culpable as he whom they had condemned.

While Voltaire's indignation was roufed, his apprehenfions were ftrongly excited. The Philofophical Dictionary had been artfully placed among the number of books before which it was faid the Chevalier de la Barre had proftrated himfelf. His enemies wifhed it to be underftood that the reading of Voltaire's works had been the caufe of thefe indifcretions, which had been conftrued into acts of impiety. Still the danger did not prevent Voltaire from undertaking the defence of thefe victims of fanaticifm. D'Etallonde, then a refugee

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at Wezel, obtained, through his re-recommendation, a commiſſion in a Pruſſian regiment. The circumſtances of the affair of Abbeville were unfolded to Europe in ſeveral publications; and the judges trembled, on their very ſeats, at the terrible judgment which they had paſſed, and which dragged them from their obſcurity to devote them to a diſgraceful immortality.

The reporting judge of Count de Lally's trial, accuſed of having contributed to the death of the Chevalier de la Barre, compelled to acknowledge the influence of that power which is independ-

ent of rank or situation, and which Nature has given to genius for the consolation and defence of the human race, wrote a letter in which, actuated alternately by shame and pride, he attempted to excuse himself and suffered menaces to escape him. Voltaire replied by the following historical trait:—"I forbid you," said an Emperor of China to the chief mandarin of the historians, "to mention me, henceforward, in your works." The mandarin, on this, took up his pen. "What do you now?" said the Emperor: "I write the order which your majesty has just given me."

During

During twelve years, that Voltaire survived this act of injuſtice, he never loſt ſight of the hope of obtaining reparation for it, but he had not the conſolation of ſucceſs. The fear of offending the parliament of Paris ſtill bore down the love of juſtice; and, at a time when the leaders of adminiſtration had a contrary intereſt, they were reſtrained by the fear of diſpleaſing the clergy. Governments do not ſufficiently know how much real importance they acquire, both with the people whom they govern and with foreign nations, by ſuch illuſtrious acts of individual juſtice, and how much more ſure the ſupport of public opinion is

than the deference paid them by certain bodies of men, rarely capable of gratitude, and part of whose authority over the vulgar mind it would be more politic to take away by these great examples than to augment, by proving, in the respect which they themselves pay to them, the fears which such bodies inspire.

Voltaire did not, meantime, neglect the means of avoiding the storm; he diminished his domestic establishment; and secured some property which he could dispose of at pleasure, with which he might procure a new place of refuge. Such had ever been his secret

 design,

deſign, in all the arrangements which he had made of his fortune, and it would have required a league among the powers of Europe, to have deprived him of independence, and to have reduced him to want. Princes and nobles were among his debtors, who do not indeed pay with much punctuality, but he had calculated the degrees of human corruption, and he knew that theſe ſame men, though they act with little delicacy in ſuch affairs, would find means to reimburſe him during the moment of perſecution, when their negligence would otherwiſe render them the objects of the horror and diſ-

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dain of Europe, indignant to behold ſuch a man oppreſſed.

This perſecution appeared for a time ready to burſt forth. Ferney is ſituated in the dioceſe of Geneva, the titular biſhop of which reſides in the ſmall town of Annecy. François de Salles, who has been raiſed to the rank of Saints, having formerly been the biſhop, in order that the heretics might not find cauſe of ſcandal in their own metropolis, it had been thought moſt proper to confide this ſee to none but a man who would not incur the reproach of pride, luxury, and effeminacy, of which the

the catholic prelates are accufed by the proteftants.

But it had long been difficult to difcover faints, who, poffeffing under-ftanding or birth, would condefcend to accept fo fmall a diocefe. He who filled the fee of Annecy, in 1767, was a man of low extraction, educated in a feminary at Paris, where he was no otherwife diftinguifhed than by auftere manners, trifling devotion, and ignorant fanaticifm. He wrote to the Count de St. Florentine, to induce him to banifh Voltaire out of his diocefe, and confequently out of the kingdom, though the poet had then built a church

church at his own expence, and ſpread abundance through a country which the perſecutions againſt the proteſtants had laid waſte. But the biſhop pretended that the Lord of Ferney had given a moral exhortation againſt theft in the church after maſs, and that the workmen who were employed by him in erecting this church had not removed an old croſs with ſufficient veneration; theſe indeed were grave inducements to drive from his country an old man who was the glory of that country, and to rob him of an aſylum to which the kingdoms of Europe haſtened to bear him the tribute of admiration. The miniſter, had it been only from

from motives of policy, could not be tempted to gratify the biſhop; he therefore adviſed Voltaire to guard againſt theſe accuſations, which the union of the biſhop of Annecy with the French prelates who poſſeſſed more influence might render dangerous.

It was at this time that he conceived the idea of ſolemnly receiving the ſacrament, which was followed by a public declaration of his reſpect for the church, and his diſdain of his detractors; a fruitleſs ſtep, which ſpoke weakneſs rather than policy, and which the pleaſure of compelling his paſtor to adminiſter the communion through fear

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of the fecular judges, and of legally infulting the bifhop of Annecy, could not excufe in the eyes of the free and intrepid man who appreciates coolly the rights of truth, and perceives that which prudence requires when laws contrary to natural juftice render truth dangerous and prudence neceffary.

The priefts fuffered the fmall advantage to efcape which they might have drawn from this fingular fcene, by falfifying the declaration which Voltaire had made.

He had no longer a retreat near Geneva. He had connected himfelf,

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on his arrival there, with the families whofe education, opinions, inclinations, and fortune, were moft congenial to his own; and thefe families had at that time formed the defign of eftablifhing a fpecies of ariftocracy. In a city which poffeffed no territory, where the ftrength of the citizens could be united with as much facility and promptitude as that of the government, fuch a project would have been abfurd had not the rich citizens entertained the hope of engaging a foreign influence in their favour.

The cabinets of Verfailles and Turin were eafily feduced. The fenate of Bern, whofe intereft it was to banifh the

The picture of republican equality from the eyes of their ſubjects, made it their conſtant policy to protect every enterpriſing ariſtocracy around them; and, throughout the whole of Switzerland, ſuch magiſtrates as became tyrants were ſure of finding, at Bern, an ardent and faithful protector. Thus the wretched pride of obtaining an odious authority in a ſmall city, and of being hated without being reſpected, deprived the citizens of Geneva of their liberty, and the republic of its independence. The chiefs of the popular party employed the weapons of fanaticiſm, for they had read enough to know the influence which religion had formerly

formerly obtained in political diffen-
ſions, but they did not ſufficiently un-
derſtand the ſpirit of their own age to
to feel how much reaſon, aided by
ridicule, had weakened this formerly
ſo dangerous weapon.

It was propoſed, therefore, to put in
force the laws which prohibited catho-
lics from poſſeſſing property in the
territory of Geneva. The magiſtrates
were cenſured for their connections
with Voltaire, who had dared to raiſe
his voice againſt the barbarous aſſaſſina-
tion of Servet, which had been com-
manded by Calvin in the name of God
to the cowardly and ſuperſtitious ſena-

 tors

tors of Geneva. Voltaire was obliged to renounce his houſe of the *Delices*.

Soon after, Rouſſeau advanced, in his Emilius, principles which developed to the citizens of Geneva all the extent of their rights, and which founded theſe rights on ſimple truths that all men could feel and all muſt adopt. The ariſtocracy wiſhed to puniſh him for the publication, but it was neceſſary they ſhould have a pretext; they took that of religion, and united themſelves with the prieſts, who, in every country, indifferent to the form of its conſtitution and the liberty of man, promiſe the aſſiſtance of Heaven

to

to the party which moſt favours into-lerance, and who become, as their in-tereſt directs, ſometimes the ſupport of the tyranny of a bigotted prince or of a ſuperſtitious ſenate, ſometimes the defenders of the liberty of a fanatic people.

Alternately expoſed to the attacks of the two parties, Voltaire obſerved a neutrality, but he remained faithful to his deteſtation of oppreſſors. He fa-voured the cauſe of the citizens againſt the magiſtrates, and that of the com-mon people who poſſeſſed no privileges againſt the citizens; for theſe people, condemned to be ever excluded from

the rights of the citizens, found themselves more oppreffed fince the latter, better informed of the privileges which is granted by the prefent fyftem of polity, but lefs enlightened refpecting the natural rights of man, confidered themfelves as fovereigns, of whom the people were no more than fubjects, and whom they thought they had an authority to reduce to fubjection, by the fame arbitrary power, for affuming which they deemed their magiftrates fo culpable.

Voltaire, therefore, wrote a poem, every part of which was impregnated with fatire, and on which no reproach

can be laid, except that of containing ſome verſes againſt Rouſſeau, which were dictated by a degree of anger; whoſe exceſs and expreſſions could not be excuſed by the juſtice of the motives which inſpired them. But when, in a tumult, the citizens had ſlain ſome of the people, he was eager to receive at Ferney the families which theſe troubles compelled to abandon Geneva; and, in the very inſtant in which the bankruptcy of the Abbé Terrai, which had not even the excuſe of neceſſity, but was occaſioned only by ſhameful expences, had deprived him of part of his fortune, he was ſeen to give aſſiſtance to thoſe who had no

property left; and to build houſes which he ſold to others at a low price to be paid him in annuities; while he ſolicited the good offices of the government in their behalf, and employed his influence with ſovereigns, miniſters, and the leading men of all nations to procure a ſale for the clocks and watches of this infant manufactory, which ſoon became famous throughout Europe.

In the mean time, the government was employed in opening an aſylum for the Geneveſe at Verſoy, on the borders of the lake. There it was deſigned to have eſtabliſhed a city, in which

which induſtry and commerce would have been free, and in which a proteſtant temple would have riſen by the ſide of a catholic church. Voltaire had cauſed this plan to be adopted, but the miniſter did not poſſeſs ſufficient credit to obtain a law for the protection of religious liberty; a ſecret toleration, limited to the time of his own adminiſtration, was all that he could offer, and with that Verſoy could not exiſt.

The year 1771 was one of the moſt embarraſſing periods of Voltaire's life. The chancellor Maupeou and the duke d'Aiguillon ſaw themſelves obliged to

attack the parliaments, to whom they both were objects of hatred, that they might not become their victims. The one could not obtain a part in the administration, nor the other preserve himself in the office which he held there, without procuring the disgrace of the Duke de Choiseul. Acting in concert with Madame du Barry, whom that minister had been imprudent enough to make his irreconcilable enemy, they persuaded the king that his contemned authority could never be restored to its vigour, that the state, incessantly agitated since the peace by parliamentary contentions, could not regain its tranquillity, if he did not

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by an act of vigour place limits to the pretenſions of the judicial bodies, which they would not venture to infringe, and if a term was not fixed beyond which they would not dare longer to oppoſe reſiſtance to the royal will.

The Duke de Choiſeul could not adopt this project without offending the public opinion, which had a long time been inimicable to him, but which was then his ſole ſupport; while his forced ſubmiſſion to the will of the people had removed him ſtill further from the confidence of the monarch, whoſe affections were alienated from him. It was probable, then, that his connections with the parliaments would complete

complete his disgrace, and that it would be easy to persuade the monarch either that his remaining in power would be the greatest obstacle to the success of the new measures of the government, or that he would endeavour to involve the nation in war, to preserve his situation in despight of the king's pleasure.

The attack made on the parliaments was directed with equal address. Whatever could alarm the nation was carefully avoided. The king appeared only to vindicate the plenitude of the legislative power, a power which would be transferred not to the nation but to the parliaments, by admitting the doc-

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trine that the parliaments had the right of regiſtering edicts according to their pleaſure. It was eaſily perceived that this power, united to the moſt extenſive judicial authority, which was divided among the twelve perpetual tribunals, would tend to eſtabliſh a tyranic ariſtocracy in France, more dangerous, than monarchy, to the ſecurity, the liberty, and the property of the citizens. The enemies of thoſe tribunals might therefore rely on the ſuffrages of enlightened minds, and on that of men of letters, whom the parliament of Paris had wounded by its inſolence and perſecution, by its attachment to prejudices, and by its pertinacity in rejecting

rejecting every improvement calculated for the happineſs of men.

But it is leſs difficult to form a political intrigue with addreſs, than to execute with wiſdom a plan of reform. The more alarming to liberty are the principles which the governing power would eſtabliſh, the more neceſſary is it to diſplay gentleneſs and indulgence to individuals. Yet, at that time, rigour was, in the minuteſt circumſtances, carried to a puerile refinement. A monarch appears cruel, who, in the puniſhments which he inflicts, does not ſcrupulouſly reſpect, conſiſtently with that puniſhment, whatever can

be

be injurious to the health, the conve-nience, or even the natural feelings of thoſe whom he puniſhes, or thoſe who are connected with them; but, on this occaſion, all theſe conſiderations were diſregarded. They refuſed permiſſion to a ſon to embrace his dying father; they confined a man in an unhealthful place, where his family could not ap-proach him without being expoſed to partake of his dangers, and a ſick per-ſon could ſcarcely obtain leave to ſeek in the capital the aſſiſtance which that alone could give him. When an abſolute government betrays fear, it proclaims either diſtruſt of its ſtrength, the indeciſion of the monarch, or the

inſtability

inſtability of the adminiſtration, and this gives encouragement to reſiſtance: but this fear was diſplayed in making the recal of ſome exiles depend on a conſent uſeleſs even in the opinion of thoſe who demanded that conſent.

A ſalutary operation does not change its nature though it be executed with wanton ſeverity; but then the feeling and enlightened man who approves, does not defend it, ſhould he think his duty calls on him to give the meaſure his ſupport, without regret; his diſguſted mind no longer acts with either zeal or affection for a cauſe which is diſhonoured by its leaders.

Thoſe

Thofe whofe minds are uninformed pafs from a hatred of the minifter to averfion to meafures which he maintains by oppreffion; and the public voice condemns that which, left to itfelf, it had perhaps approved.

The great number of magiftrates who were by this revolution deprived of their offices, the merit and virtues of fome of them, the crowd of fubordinate minifters of juftice who were connected with their fate by honour and by intereft, that natural propenfity which leads men to join the caufe of thofe who fuffer, the hatred of power not lefs natural, all neceffa-

rily co-operated to render the meafures of the minifter odious, and to place obftacles in his way when, compelled to replace the tribunals which he wifhed to deftroy, force became ufelefs and confidence neceffary.

However, the barbarity of the criminal law, the difgufting defects of the civil jurifprudence, prefented to the authors of the revolution fure means to regain the public opinion, and to give thofe who fhould confent to replace the former parliaments an excufe which honour and patriotifm might have been proud to avow. Minifters difdained thefe means. The parliament had rendered

dered itſelf obnoxious to all enlighten-
ed men by the obſtacles which it op-
poſed to the liberty of the preſs, and
by its fanaticiſm, of which the recent
execution of the Chevalier de la Barre
had given an example to all Europe.
Yet, irritated by libels publiſhed againſt
himſelf, alarmed by works in which
his principles had been attacked, and,
in ſhort, deſirous of gaining a ſupport
in the clergy, the chancellor thought
proper to lay new reſtrictions on the
preſs. The ſtain was not removed
from the memory of the Chevalier de
la Barre, nor could Voltaire obtain a
reviſion of the ſentence which would
have covered thoſe with diſgrace whom

it was ſo particularly the intereſt of the chancellor to deprive of the public favour. The criminal code exiſted in all its horror, although eight days would have ſufficed to have formed a law which would have ſuppreſſed the puniſhment of death ſo wantonly inflicted, would have aboliſhed every ſpecies of torture, and would have prohibited exceſs in corporal puniſhment; which would have granted the accuſed the aſſiſtance of a counſel, would have permitted him to make a certain number of challenges without alledging his motives, would have given him the right to preſent evidence and to diſplay facts in his favour, and would have made a

very confiderable majority of the judges neceffary to his condemnation ; which, in fine, would have infured him the power of knowing and examining all the proceedings. The nation, all Europe would have applauded the reform ; the difplaced magiftrates would alone have been the enemies of thefe falutary innovations; and their fall the epoch, in which the fovereign had recovered the liberty of yielding to his juft and humane purpofes.

In truth the fale of judicial offices was fuppreffed ; yet, the judges being ftill named by the court, nothing was feen in this change but the facility of

placing on the feat of juftice men without fortune and more eafy to be feduced.

The bounds of the moft extenfive jurifdictions were circumfcribed, but the new courts were not erected into parliaments; they were not permitted to regifter arrets, and this difference between thofe and the former tribunals was the fure prefage of their deftruction. In fine, the fees of the judges were abolifhed and replaced by ftated falaries; and this regulation, among all that were adopted, was the only one which reafon could entirely approve.

The

The authors of this revolution at length beheld its accomplifhment, notwithftanding an almoft univerfal difcontent. The Duke de Choifeul, accufed of fecretly fomenting the refiftance, unfteady as it was, of the parliament of Paris, and of having retarded the conclufion of peace between England and Spain, was exiled to his eftates. The parliament, whofe gratitude obliged them to affume firmnefs, was foon difperfed. The Duke d'Aiguillon became minifter, and the parliament was fucceeded by a new tribunal. In fome of the provinces the parliaments experienced the fate of that of Paris, while others confented

to remain and ſacrifice ſeveral of their members. All was ſilent before authority; and nothing was wanting to the ſucceſs of the miniſters but the approbation of the public whom they ſcorned, and who, ſome years after, wrought their diſgrace.

Voltaire deſpiſed the parliament of Paris, and loved the Duke de Choiſeul; he beheld in one an ancient perſecutor who had not been diſarmed but further incenſed by his fame, in the other a friend and a protector. He was conſtant in his gratitude and immoveable in his principles. All his letters expreſſed his regard for the Duke de

Choiſeul

Choiſeul with freedom and energy, and he was not ignorant that his letters, in conſequence of the infamous cuſtom of violating public faith, were read by the enemies of the exiled miniſter. A pleaſant tale, entitled *Barmécide**, which he wrote, is the only durable monument of the concern which this diſgrace had excited. The injuſtice with which the friends and partizans of the Duke de Choiſeul accuſed Voltaire of ingratitude was, therefore, one of the ſevereſt afflictions which he had ever endured; and it was the more poignant as the Duke himſelf partook of the injuſtice.

* The letter of *Benaldaki* to *Caramuſti*. VOLUME OF LETTERS.

Ineffectually did Voltaire endeavour to undeceive him, ineffectually did he appeal to the proofs he had given of his attachment and his ſorrow:

*Je l'ai dit à la terre, au ciel, à Guſman même**:

he wrote in his grief, but he was not underſtood.

The great and people in office have intereſts, but rarely opinions. To oppoſe thoſe who agree with their preſent deſigns is, in their eyes, to declare againſt themſelves. That attachment of truth, which is one of the ſtrongeſt paſ-

* To earth, to heaven, to Guſman's ſelf the tale I told.

ſions

ſions of exalted and independent minds, appears romantic to them. They ſuppoſe that a philoſopher has, like themſelves, no opinions but thoſe of the moment, and conſequently that he muſt change his profeſſions according to the temporary intereſts of their friends or patrons. They conſider him as a man made to defend the cauſe which they have embraced and not to ſupport his own principles; to ſerve under them and not to examine the juſtice of the war. Thus the Duke de Choiſeul appeared to imagine that Voltaire, in deference to him, ought either to have betrayed or concealed his opinions on queſtions of public right. An important anec-

dotes

dote, which proves how eaſily the pride of power and birth deſtroys the recollection of the natural independence of the human ſoul, and which diſplays the inequality of men's minds, which is much more real than that of their rank or ſituation.

Voltaire beheld, with pleaſure, the practice of ſelling judicial offices aboliſhed, the fees of the judges ſuppreſſed, and the immenſe juriſdiction of the parliament of Paris contracted within narrower limits: abuſes which he had combated, for more than forty years, with the weapons of reaſon and ridicule. He preferred a ſingle maſter to many;

many; a ſovereign whoſe prejudices are alone to be feared to a troop of deſpots whoſe prejudices are greater but whoſe partial intereſts and little paſſions are more fatal to mankind, and who, more formidable to the unprotected, are eſpecially ſo to men whoſe knowledge alarms them and whoſe glory irritates them. He was wont to ſay: "I have a ſtubborn back; I can make a ſingle bow well enough, but a hundred bows in ſucceſſion are too fatiguing."

He therefore applauded the regulations which had been adopted, and, among men of congenial minds, he expreſſed

preſſed his approbation. Doubtleſs, he perceived with what contracted views this happy opportunity of reforming the legiſlation, of unſhackling the mind and reſtoring to man the rights of men, of at once proſcribing intolerance and barbarity, and, in fine, of dating from this moment, the epoch of a revolution propitious to the nation, glorious to the prince and his miniſters, had been neglected and loſt. But Voltaire had alſo too much penetration not to feel that though the laws were the ſame the magiſtrates were changed; that if even theſe ſhould inherit the ſpirit of their predeceſſors neither their credit nor their inſolence could deſcend to them,

that the innovation, by depriving them of the blind refpect which the vulgar entertain for all that bears the ruft of antiquity, had deprived them of much of their power, that the public voice could alone reftore their influence, and to obtain its fuffrage there remained no other means than that of liftening to reafon and of uniting themfelves to the enemies of prejudice, and the friends of the human race.

The approbation which Voltaire gave to the meafures of the Chancellor Maupeou, was at leaft ferviceable to the oppreffed. Though he could not procure juftice to be done to the memory

of

of the unfortunate la Barre, though he could not reftore the young d' Etallonde to his country, though the minifter's pufillanimous refpect for the clergy concealed from him the true intereft of his glory, ftill Voltaire had the happinefs to fave the wife of Montbailli. This unhappy man, accufed of parricide, had perifhed on the wheel; his wife was alfo condemned to death; but fhe was fuppofed to be pregnant, and was fortunate enough to obtain a refpite.

The tribunals had juft rejected a provident law which, placing an interval between judgment and execution in

which

which the truth might be difcovered and innocence difplayed, would have prevented almoft all their unjuft decifions; and they had refufed it with an intemperance which fufficed to prove its neceffity.* Women alone, by declaring themfelves pregnant, could efcape the danger of thefe precipitate executions. In the fpace of lefs than twenty years the lives of three innocent perfons, who had attracted the public curiofity by fome particular cir-

* It is but juftice to obferve that all the magiftrates did not entertain this high idea of their rights, and this love of power. One of them has merited the efteem and veneration of every citizen, by fpeaking, in the parliament of Paris, thefe remarkable words: *The citizens alone have rights; the magiftrates, as magiftrates, have only duties.*

cumftances,

cumſtances, had been ſaved by this privilege; another proof of the utility of that law which was oppoſed only by a barbarous pride, and which ought to exiſt till experience ſhall have proved that the new legiſlation (which doubtleſs will ſoon replace the old code) no longer expoſes innocence to any danger.

The trial of the wife of Montbailli was reviſed; the council of Artois, by which ſhe had been condemned, declared her innocent; and, more noble or leſs preſumptuous than the parliament of Thoulouſe, they lamented the irreparable misfortune of having cauſed

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an innocent perſon to periſh, and they impoſed on themſelves the duty of providing for the remaining days of the unfortunate woman whoſe happineſs they had deſtroyed.

Had Voltaire expreſſed his zeal againſt ſuch acts of injuſtice only as were connected with public events or the cauſe of toleration, he might have been accuſed of vanity; but this zeal was equally ardent in that obſcure cauſe, to which his name alone has given celebrity.

We have ſince ſeen, in like manner, a magiſtrate*, too ſoon ſnatched away

* M. Dupati.

from his friends and the unfortunate, intereſt Europe in the cauſe of three peaſants of Champagne; and obtain, by his eloquence and perſeverance, a ſplendid and laſting fame, the reward of zeal which humanity and the love of juſtice alone had inſpired. Men incapable of theſe actions never fail to attribute them to a deſire of renown; they know not what anguiſh the ſpectacle of an unjuſt act inflicts on a noble and feeling mind, to what degree it torments memory and thought, and how greatly it cauſes the imperious deſire of preventing or repairing a crime to be felt; they are ignorant of that emotion, that involuntary horror, which

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is excited in all the fenfes by the fight, even by the mere idea, of an oppreffor efcaping with triumph or impunity; and we muft pity thofe who could think that the author of Alzire and Brutus needed the glory attendant on a good action, to incite him to defend innocence and to rife up againft tyranny.

A new occafion of avenging infulted humanity was prefented to Voltaire. Vaffalage folemnly abolifhed in France by Louis *Hutin (the boifterous)*, again exifted under Louis XV. in many provinces. In vain had a project of abolifhing it been more than once formed. Avarice and pride had filenced juftice, by a refift-

ance which had fatigued the indolence of government; and the ſuperior tribunals, compoſed of nobles, had favoured the pretenſions of the proprietors of theſe ſeignories.

This enormity tyranniſed over Franche Comté, and particularly over the territory of St. Claude, the ſecular monks of which, in 1742, owed the greateſt part of their lands, held in Mort-Main, to nothing better than falſe titles; and exerciſed their rights with a rigour which reduced to miſery an uninformed but good and induſtrious people. At the death of each poſſeſſor, if his children had not conſtantly inhabited the paternal

paternal houſe, the fruit of his labours appertained to the monks; the widow and her offspring, without furniture, without cloaths, and without dwelling, paſſed from the competence procured by labour, to all the horrors of want. Should a ſtranger die after having dwelt a year on this ſpecies of land, ſtrucken with the feudal anathema, his property alſo became that of the monks; nor did a ſon ſucceed to the inheritance of his father, if it could be proved that he had paſſed the night of his nuptials out of the paternal houſe.

Theſe people ſuffered without daring to complain, and beheld, with mute

grief, the fruits of their economy, which ſhould have furniſhed uſeful capitals to induſtry and the culture of the land, become the prey of the monks. Happily, the conſtruction of a great road opened a communication between them and the neighbouring cantons. They learnt that, at the foot of mount Jura, there exiſted a man whoſe intrepid voice had more than once cauſed the very palaces of kings to reſound with the complaints of the oppreſſed, and at whoſe name ſacerdotal tyranny turned pale. To him they related their griefs, and in him they found a protector,

Theſe

Thefe ufurpations, this inexorable cruelty of hypocritical priefts, who dared to call themfelves the difciples of an humble mafter yet wifhed to hold men in flavery, were proclaimed, not only to France but to all Europe. Yet, after foliciting relief for many years, nothing could be obtained from the timid fucceffor of M. de Maupeou, except an arret of council, which forbade this bafe violation of the rights of mankind. His fear of difobliging the parliament of Befançon would not permit him to withdraw, from its jurifdiction, a caufe which could not be regarded as an ordinary fuit without fhamefully acknowledging the legiti-

macy of the feudal ſlavery. The vaſſals of St. Claude were ſent back to a tribunal, whoſe members, the lords of the lands ſubject to this tyranny, took a barbarous pleaſure in riveting the chains of thoſe poor people; who ſtill continue enſlaved.

All they have obtained was the liberty, granted them in 1778, of abandoning their home and their country to eſcape from the dominion of the monks; but another article of that ſame law more than balanced this benefaction, ſo ineffectual to unfortunate men, whom poverty rather than the law has confined to the ſpot of their birth. In this

this very edict the sovereign has, for the first time, given the name and sacred character of property to the detestable rights which, even in the midst of the ignorance and barbarity of the thirteenth century, were considered as usurpations which neither time nor titles can render legitimate; and an hypocritical minister has made the liberty of the peasant depend, not on the justice of laws, but on the will of his tyrants.

Who that reads these details would suppose that he reads the life of a great poet, of a prolific and indefatigable writer? We forget his literary fame,

as

as he himſelf loſt ſight of it. He ſeemed no longer to purſue any object of fame, but that of avenging the human race, and of ſnatching victims from oppreſſion.

His genius, however, incapable of inactivity, cultivated every ſpecies of literature on which it had ever exerciſed its powers, and even dared to eſſay new ſubjects. He publiſhed ſome tragedies, which we may doubtleſs, reproach with feebleneſs, and which could no longer force the applauſes of an audience whom he himſelf had rendered difficult, but in which the man of letters may gratify his taſte by beautiful verſes, and his judgment

judgment by prcfound, enlightened ideas, while he who is ambitious to write for the theatre may in them ſtudy the ſecrets of his art; he wrote tales, in which that ſpecies of compoſition, till then employed only to reflect pleaſing and voluptuous images, which amuſe the imagination or awaken gaiety, aſſumed a more philoſophic character, and became, like the apologue, a ſchool of morality and reaſon; he wrote epiſtles, which, if compared with his firſt works, will be found leſs correct, leſs uniformly animated, and leſs poetical; but, in return, poſſeſſed of more ſimplicity and variety, a more general and free ſpirit of philoſophy, and a greater

greater number of thofe acute and deep remarks which are the product of experience. To thefe he added fatires, in which prejudice and its patrons are ridiculed under a thoufand varying forms.

About the fame time, in his Philofophy of Hiftory, he gave leffons to hiftorians, while he provoked the enmity of pedants, by unveiling their dulnefs, credulity, and invidious admiration of antiquity; he finifhed his Effay on the Manners and Spirit of Nations, his Age of Louis XIV. to which he added the Age of Louis XV. an incomplete but faithful hiftory, the only

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one by which we can form an adequate idea of the events of that reign, and in which we find all the truth that can be expected in a cotemporary hiftory, which is neither a libel nor a eulogium.

New romances, works fometimes ferious and fometimes humorous, and dictated by circumftances, did not add to his reputation, but they continued to render it ever prefent with the public, to fuftain the interefts of his partifans, and to humiliate that herd of fecret enemies, who affumed the mafk of aufterity, that they might withhold

that

that admiration which the example of Europe commanded them to give.

In fine, he undertook to aſſemble, in the form of a dictionary, all the ideas which preſented themſelves to his mind on the various objects of his reflections; that is to ſay, on almoſt all that is compriſed in the circle of human knowledge. In this collection, modeſtly entitled, Queſtions to the Lovers of Science reſpecting the Encyclopedia, he treats ſucceſſively of theology, grammar, natural philoſophy, and literature. At one time, he diſcuſſes the ſubjects of antiquity; at others, queſtions of policy,

policy, legiflation, and public economy. His ftyle ever animated and feductive, clothed thefe various objects with a charm hitherto known to himfelf only; and which chiefly fprings from the licence with which, yielding to his fucceffive emotions, adapting his ftyle lefs to his fubject than to the momentary difpofition of his mind, fometimes he fpreads ridicule on objects which feem capable of infpiring only horror, and, almoft inftantaneoufly hurried away by the energy and fenfibility of his foul, he vehemently and eloquently exclaims againft abufes which he had juft before treated with mockery. His anger is excited

excited by falfe tafte; he quickly perceives that his indignation ought to be referved for interefts which are more important; and he finifhes by laughing in his ufual way. Sometimes, he abruptly leaves a moral or political difcuffion for a literary criticifm; and, in the midft of a leffon on tafte, he pronounces abftract maxims of the profoundeft philofophy, or makes a fudden and terrible attack on fanaticifm and tyranny.

The conftant intereft which Voltaire took in the fuccefs of Ruffia againft the Turks deferves to be noticed.

 Highly

Highly diſtinguiſhed by the favours of the empreſs, doubtleſs gratitude animated his zeal; but we ſhould be deceived did we imagine his zeal had no other cauſe. Superior to thoſe politics of the counting-houſe, which take the intereſt of merchants known to financiers for the intereſts of commerce, and the intereſts of commerce for that of the human race, not leſs ſuperior to thoſe vain ideas of the balance of Europe ſo valuable to political compilers, he beheld, in the deſtruction of the Ottoman empire, millions of men at leaſt aſſured of ſhunning under the deſpotiſm of a ſovereign the intolerable deſpotiſm of a whole people; he hoped

to ſee the imperious manners of the Eaſt which condemn women to a diſgraceful ſlavery baniſhed into the unhappy climates that gave them birth. Immenſe countries ſituated under a propitious Heaven, deſtined by nature to be clothed with all the productions moſt uſeful to mankind, would have been reſtored to the induſtry of their inhabitants; theſe countries, the firſt in which man diſcovered genius, would have beheld, again ſpringing up in their boſom, the arts of which they gave the moſt perfect models, and the ſciences, whoſe foundations were laid by them.

The

The uſual ſpeculations of ſome merchants would without doubt have been deranged, and their profits diminiſhed; but the real welfare of all people would have been augmented, becauſe it is not poſſible to extend the ſpace on the globe in which agriculture flouriſhes, commerce is ſecure, and induſtry active, without increaſing for the uſe of all men the maſs of enjoyments and reſources. Can it be deſirable that a philoſopher ſhould prefer the riches of ſome nations to the liberty of an entire people, and the commerce of a few cities to the progreſs of agriculture and of the arts in a great empire? Far from us be thoſe deſpicable reaſoners who would

ſtill hold Greece in Turkiſh chains, in order that they may ſeize on the perſons of men, ſell them as herds of cattle, compel them, by the dread of puniſhment, to furniſh food for their inſatiable avarice; and who gravely calculate the pretended wealth which is produced, by theſe outrages on nature.

That men ſhould every where be free, and that each country ſhould enjoy the advantages given it by nature, would be the common intereſts of all people, as well of thoſe who have reaſſumed their rights as of thoſe in which certain individuals, and not the community

community, have been benefitted by the diſtreſs of others. Oppoſed to objects ſo grand and to that eternal good which would ariſe out of a revolution ſo vaſt, of what importance would the ruin of a few avaricious men be; and of men too, whoſe wealth originated in the tears and the blood of their fellow citizens!

Thus thought M. Turgot; and thus Voltaire could not but think.

Men have declaimed againſt the injuſtice of a war againſt the Turks: can we be unjuſt toward a hoard of robbers, who hold a people in ſlavery,

and whoſe avidious ferocity overwhelms theſe people with outrages? Let them return to thoſe deſerts which the imbecility of Europe permitted them to quit, ſince, in their brutal pride, they have continued to produce a race of tyrants! At length, let the country of thoſe to whom we owe our knowledge, our arts, and even our virtues, ceaſe to be diſhonoured by the preſence of a people who unite the deſpicable vices of effeminacy to the ferocity of ſavages!

Fears are entertained for the balance of Europe, as though ſuch conqueſts would not diminiſh, inſtead of increaſing the power of the conquerors; as though

though Aſia muſt not long offer an eaſy prey to the ambitious, which would give them a diſtaſte for the hazardous conqueſts which might be obtained in Europe. It is not the policy of princes, it is the wiſdom of a civiliſed people, which muſt for ever preſerve the peace of Europe; and the more civilization ſhall extend over the earth, the more ſhall we behold war and conqueſts, as well as ſlavery and miſery, diſappear.

Louis the XVth died. This prince, who had long in his conduct contemned the precepts of the moral chriſtian, was not, however, ſuperior to ſuperſtitious terrors. The menaces of religion

assumed new vigour to terrify him on the appearance of the least danger; but he imagined that a promise of continence so easily made on a death-bed, and certain words from the mouth of a priest, could expiate the errors of a reign of sixty years. Even more timid than superstitious, accustomed by the Cardinal de Fleury to consider liberty of thought as a cause of disorder in states, or at least of embarrassment to governments, it was nevertheless in despight of himself that under his reign human reason made a rapid progress in France. He who laboured for its advancement with most success and splendour was become the object of his

hatred,

hatred. Yet he reſpected in Voltaire the glory of France; and could not view, without pride, the admiration of Europe place one of his ſubjects in the firſt rank of illuſtrious characters.

His death made no change in Voltaire's ſituation. To the prejudices of Cardinal de Fleury, M. Maurepas joined a ſtill more implacable hatred of all thoſe who roſe ſuperior to the ordinary claſs of men.

Voltaire had been profuſe of his exaggerated praiſe of Louis XV. till the time of his viſit to the court of Pruſſia,

but

but without being able to disarm the king's unjust dislike of him. He had observed an almost absolute silence from the period in which the errors and misfortunes of this reign would have rendered eulogy abject. But after the death of that monarch he dared to be just to his memory, at the instant in which nearly the whole nation seemed happy in wounding his name. It has been remarked that the philosophers, whom Louis XV. did not patronize, were at that time the only persons who observed some impartiality; while the priests, loaden with his benefactions, insulted his weakness.

The

The new reign ſoon preſented to Voltaire hopes which he had not dared to form. M. Turgot was called to the adminiſtration. Voltaire knew him to be a man of profound genius, who, in every ſpecies of ſcience, had created ſure and determinate principles on which he had founded all his opinions, and according to which he directed the whole of his conduct; a glory that no other ſtateſman has been worthy of partaking with him. He knew that, to a ſoul zealous for the truth and for the happineſs of man, M. Turgot united fortitude that was above all fear, and grandeur of character ſuperior to all diſſimulation; that in his eyes the moſt important

important ſituation was but the means of executing his ſalutary views; and appeared to him no more than a vile ſlavery when that hope ſhould be loſt. In fine, Voltaire knew that, free from all prejudices and deteſting, in thoſe prejudices, the moſt dangerous enemies of the human race, M. Turgot regarded the liberty of thought and of the preſs as the right of each citizen, and the right of entire nations, whoſe happineſs the progreſs of reaſon alone can eſtabliſh on an immoveable baſis.

In the nomination of M. Turgot, Voltaire ſaw the dawn of the reign of reaſon; ſo long diſavowed and much

much longer perſecuted; he dared to look for the rapid fall of prejudices, and for the deſtruction of that cowardly and tyrannic policy which, tofl atter the pride or indolence of men in place, had condemned the people to humiliation and miſery.

Yet his attempts in favour of the vaſſals of Mount Jura were ineffectual; and in vain he endeavoured to obtain for d'Etallonde, and for the memory of the Chevalier de la Barre, that diſtinguiſhed juſtice which humanity and the national honour equally required. Theſe objects were foreign to the department of the finances; and that

that ſuperiority of information, of character, and of virtue, which M. Turgot could not conceal, had created him, in the other miniſters and in the intriguing ſubalterns of office, too many enemies; who, finding neither ambition nor perſonal projects to oppoſe in him, bent themſelves againſt all that they believed conſonant with his juſt and beneficent deſigns.

Beſide, liberty could not be reſtored to the vaſſals of mount Jura without offending the parliament of Beſançon; the reviſion of the proceſs of Abbeville had humiliated that of Paris; and an unwiſe policy had re-eſtabliſhed the

 parliaments

parliaments without taking advantage of their temporary overthrow, and the little credit of thoſe who had replaced them, to introduce into the laws and the tribunals an entire reform, the neceſſity of which was felt by all enlightened men. But an adminiſtration which was feeble, and the enemy of reformation, did not dare or did not wiſh to ſeize this occaſion, in which the public good had found ſtill leſs obſtacles than in the inſtance which was ſo ſhamefully neglected by the Chancellor Maupeou.

Thus alſo, through complaiſance to the prejudices of the parliaments, miniſters

ſters ſuffered the advantages for the reform of education to be loſt, which was offered to them by the deſtruction of the Jeſuits. They did not even, in 1774, take any precaution to prevent the renewal of the contentions which, in 1770, had led to the ruin of the magiſtracy. They had purſued but a ſingle object, the advantage of ſecuring a perſonal gratitude, which gave to the authors of the change a means of employing the credit of the corps, whoſe re-eſtabliſhment was their work, with ſucceſs againſt the rivals of their power.

Hence the only advantage which Voltaire could obtain, from the administration

niſtration of M. Turgot, was to withdraw the little country of Gex from the tyranny of the *farms*. Separated from France by mountains, having an eaſy communication with Geneva and Switzerland, this unfortunate country could not be ſubjected to the revenue laws without becoming the theatre of perpetual war between the ſervants of the revenue and the inhabitants, nor without paying expences for the collection ſtill more burdenſome than the impoſts themſelves. The little importance of this regulation ſhould have rendered it eaſy; yet, it was long ſolicited, in vain, by M. de Voltaire.

Part of the provinces of France have, through various caufes, efcaped the yoke of the *Farm-general*, or have only borne half of its weight; but the farmers-general have inceffantly increafed their limits, and envelloped in their chains detached cantons which had long been protected by feudal privileges. They believed that their God *Terminus*, like that of the Romans, ought never to recede; and that the firft ftep he fhould retreat would be the prefage of deftruction to the empire. Their oppofition, however, could not induce M. Turgot to abandon a juft and beneficent operation, which, without injury

injury to the revenue, would leſſen the burden of the inhabitants, diminiſh the number of crimes and oppreſſions, and reſtore proſperity and peace to a diſtrict pillaged by deſpotiſm.

The country of Gex, then, was delivered from the yoke, on condition of raiſing thirty thouſand livres; and Voltaire had the pleaſure of writing to his friends, in a parody of a verſe of Mithridates:

Et mes derniers regards ont vu fuir les commis *.

Voltaire's reſpect for M. Turgot would have been augmented by the

* And, at length, I've ſeen the exciſemen fly.

edicts of 1776 had he not already known that minifter's genius, and comprehended his views. This great ftatefman had perceived that, placed at the head of the finances at a moment in which he was embarraffed by the mafs of the public debt, and by obftacles which the courtiers and the firft minifter oppofed to every great reform in adminiftration and to all important economy, he could not diminifh the impofts; but he wifhed, at leaft, to give fome confolation to the people, and fome indemnity to the proprietors of lands, by reftoring to them rights of which they had been deprived by oppreffive regulations.

The

The remains of feudal ſlavery which ſpread deſolation through the country, which compelled the poor to labour without hire, and deprived agriculture of the huſbandmen's cattle, were changed into an impoſt, paid only by the proprietors of land. Through all the cities, ridiculous corporations obliged a part of the inhabitants to purchaſe the right of labouring; thoſe who ſubſiſted by commerce or their own induſtry were compelled to live under the vaſſalage of a certain number of privileged people, or to pay a tribute to theſe bodies; this abſurd inſtitution diſappeared, and the right of

freely employing their time and ſtrength was reſtored to the citizens.

The proprietors of grain and of wine, the firſt harraſſed by popular prejudices, the other by deſpotic privileges, which had been extorted by particular cities, were relieved from thoſe oppreſſions; and theſe wiſe laws could not fail to accelerate the progreſs of agriculture, and multiply the national wealth, by inſuring the ſubſiſtence of the people.

But theſe beneficent edicts were the ſignal of that miniſter's fall who had the

the boldneſs to conceive them. They excited the oppoſition of the parliaments who were intereſted in ſupporting the *Jurandes** the fertile ſource of lucrative law ſuits, who were not leſs attached to the old regulations which furniſhed them with the means of acting on the minds of the people, who were irritated to ſee the burden of making roads laid on the opulent owners of land, and were without any hope that an unworthy condeſcenſion would continue to lighten the weight of their individual taxes, but who were more particularly alarmed at the influence

* The wardenſhip of the different companies of tradeſmen.

which ſeemed to be acquired by a miniſter, whoſe benevolent ſpirit menaced the overthrow of their power.

The intrigues of the enemies of M. Turgot were ſtrengthened by this league of the parliaments; and it was then perceived how ſerviceable to their ſecret and pernicious deſigns was the manner in which the tribunals had been re-eſtabliſhed; it was then ſeen how dangerous it is to a miniſter to deſign the welfare of the people; and, perhaps, were we to mount up to the cauſe of events, we ſhould find that the fall even of vicious miniſters has originated in the good which they wiſhed

wiſhed to do, and not in the evil which they have produced.

In the calamities of France Voltaire beheld the deſtruction of hopes which he had entertained for the advancement of the human mind. He had imagined that intolerance, ſuperſtition, and the monſtrous prejudices which infected every branch of legiſlation, every department of power, and all conditions of ſociety, would have fled before a miniſter who was the friend of juſtice, of liberty, and reaſon. Such as have accuſed Voltaire of baſe adulation, ſuch as have bitterly reproached him with the uſe which he made of praiſe,

praiſe, perhaps too frequently, to influence the minds of powerful men and to compel them to be juſt and humane, may compare thoſe praiſes to his eulogy of M. Turgot, and to his *Epiſtle to a Man* which he addreſſed to that miniſter at the moment of his diſgrace. They will then diſtinguiſh the admiration which is the reſult of feeling, from a compliment; and the eſteem which ariſes in the ſoul, from the play of imagination; and they will perceive that Voltaire committed no other crime than that of treating courtiers as women: nearly the ſame proteſtations are beſtowed on the whole ſex, and it is the tone alone that diſtinguiſhes

ſtinguiſhes the praiſe which is felt from that which is given to politeneſs.

Voltaire, offering incenſe to kings and miniſters to engage them on the ſide of truth, and Voltaire, celebrating genius and virtue, ſpeaks not the ſame language. Did he wiſh only to flatter, he was prodigal of the charms of his brilliant imagination, he multiplied theſe ingenious ideas which were ever ready at his call; but did he wiſh to render an homage acknowledged by his heart, it was his ſoul which eſcaped him, it was his reaſon which ſpoke. During his viſit to Paris his admiration of M. Turgot was in-

fuſed

fused through all his discourse. M. Turgot was the man whom he opposed to all who complained of the depravity of our age; and to him his mind gave its entire approbation. I have seen him take his hands, bathe them with his tears, kiss them, in despight of M. Turgot's resistance, and cry with a voice interrupted by sobs: "Let me kiss the hand which would seal the happiness of the people."

Voltaire had long desired to revisit his country, and to enjoy his reputation in the midst of the same people who had been the witness of his first success and too often the accomplice of his enemies.

enemies. M. de Villette had lately, at Ferney, efpoufed Mademoifelle de Varicour, a lady defcended from a noble family in the country of Gex, whom her relations had confided to the care of Madame Denis. Voltaire accompanied them to Paris, partly led by the defire of feeing the reprefentation of the tragedy of Irene, which he had fhortly before finifhed. It had been kept a profound fecret; and malice had not time to prepare her poifon, nor would the public enthufiafm have permitted its operation. A croud of men and women of every rank and condition, from whom his verfes had drawn the tears of humanity, who had

ſo frequently admired his genius at the theatre and in reading his works, who were indebted to him for their improvement, whoſe prejudices he had deſtroyed, and to whom he had imparted a ſpark of that zeal againſt fanaticiſm by whoſe flame he was devoured, were eager to behold him. Jealouſy was ſilent before a glory which it was impoſſible to extinguiſh, before the benefit which he had conferred on mankind. Miniſters, and proud prelates, were obliged to reſpect the idol of the nation. This enthuſiaſm was even ſpread through the common ranks of the people; they crouded round his windows, and paſſed whole hours there with the

hope

hope of feeing him for one moment. His carriage, which could fcarcely proceed along the ftreets, was furrounded by a numerous multitude, who bleffed him and celebrated his works.

The French academy, which had not adopted him till the age of fifty-two, lavifhed honours on him, and received him rather as fovereign of the empire of letters than as an equal. The children of thofe haughty courtiers, whofe pride had been wounded to fee him live in their fociety without meannefs, and who had wifhed to humiliate in his perfon the fuperiority of genius and talents, contended for the honour

of being preſented to him, and of an opportunity to boaſt that they had ſeen Voltaire.

But it was at the theatre, where he had ſo long reigned, that he had the greateſt honours to expect. He went to the third repreſentation of Irene; which was, indeed, but a feeble tragedy; which, however, poſſeſſed many beauties, and in which the wrinkles of age could not conceal the ſacred impreſſion of genius. He alone drew the attention of a people, eager to diſtinguiſh his features, to obſerve his geſtures, to purſue the direction of his eyes. His buſt was crowned on the

ſtage

ſtage in the midſt of applauſe, cries of joy, and tears of enthuſiaſm. To quit the theatre he muſt paſs through the multitude that crouded round him; feeble, ſcarce able to ſupport himſelf, the guards, which were deſigned to protect him from the eagerneſs of zeal, became uſeleſs; at his approach, each retired with a reſpectful attention, or diſputed the honour of ſupporting him a moment on the ſtairs; each ſtep offered him new aid, nor was any one permitted to arrogate too long the right of giving him aſſiſtance.

The ſpectators followed him to his apartment, and the air was filled with

the cries of *Long live Voltaire! Long live the Henriade! Long live Mahomet!* numbers fell at his feet, and numbers kiſſed his garment. Never has man been received with more intereſting marks of admiration and of public affection, nor ever has genius been honoured by a more flattering homage; and this homage was addreſſed, not to his power, but to the happineſs which he had conferred on man. An illuſtrious poet would have been received only with plaudits: tears flowed before the philoſopher, who had deſtroyed the fetters of reaſon, and avenged the cauſe of humanity.

The

The ſublime and impaſſioned ſoul of Voltaire was moved with theſe tributes of reſpect and zeal: "They wiſh me to die with pleaſure," he ſaid; but it was the voice of ſenſibility, and not the artiſice of ſelf-love. In the midſt of the honours paid him by the French academy, he was particularly ſtruck by the poſſibility of introducing into that place a more daring philoſophy: "They treat me with more attention than I merit," he ſaid to me, one day; "do you know that I do not deſpair of cauſing the eulogium of Coligny to be ſpoken there?"

During the run of Irene, he was employed in reviſing his eſſay on the

Manners and the ſpirit of Nations; and to give, in that work, ſome new wounds to fanaticiſm. He had with ſecret pleaſure obſerved, at the theatre, that the lines which were received with the greateſt acclamations were thoſe in which he attacked ſuperſtition and the names ſhe had long rendered ſacred; and it was to this object he aſcribed all the glory he had acquired. He beheld, in that general admiration, the empire which he had exerciſed over the mind, and the deſtruction of prejudices which he had accompliſhed.

At this ſame time, Paris boaſted, alſo, the preſence of the celebrated

Franklin, who, in another hemifphere, had been the apoftle of philofophy and toleration. Like Voltaire, he had often employed the weapon of humour which corrects the abfurdities of men, and had difplayed their perverfenefs as a folly more fatal, but alfo worthy of pity. He had joined to the fcience of metaphyficks the genius of practical philofophy; as Voltaire, that of poetry. Franklin had delivered the vaft countries of America from the yoke of Europe; and Voltaire had freed Europe from the yoke of the ancient theocracy of Afia. Franklin was eager to fee a man whofe reputation had long been fpread over both worlds; Voltaire, al-

though he had loſt the habit of ſpeaking Engliſh, endeavoured to ſupport the converſation in that language; and, afterwards reaſſuming the French, he ſaid: *Je n'ai pu réſiſter au déſir de parler un moment la langue de M. Franklin* *.

The American philoſopher preſented his grandſon to Voltaire, with a requeſt that he would give him his benediction. "God and liberty!" ſaid Voltaire: "it is the only benediction which can be given to the grandſon of Franklin." They went together to a public aſſembly of the academy of ſciences, and the

* I could not reſiſt the deſire of ſpeaking the language of Mr. Franklin for a moment.

public

public at the ſame time beheld with emotion theſe two men, born in different quarters of the globe, reſpectable by their years, their glory, the employment of their life, and both enjoying the influence which they had exerciſed over the age in which they lived. They embraced each other in the midſt of public acclamations, and it was ſaid to be Solon who embraced Sophocles. But the French Sophocles had trampled on error and advanced the reign of reaſon; and the Solon of Philadelphia, having placed the conſtitution of his country on the immoveable foundation of the rights of men, had no fear of ſeeing his uncertain laws, even during his own

life, open the way to tyranny and prepare fetters for his country.

Age had not enfeebled the activity of Voltaire, and the tranſports with which he was received by his fellow citizens ſeemed to renew his vigour. He formed the deſign of refuting whatever the Duke de St. Simon in his memoirs, then unpubliſhed, had written under the influence of hatred and prejudice, leſt theſe memoirs, which might derive ſome authority from the known probity of the author and from his rank and title of cotemporary, ſhould appear at a time in which men would be too far removed from the events of which he

he ſpeaks, to detect error and defend the truth.

He had alſo induced the French academy to adopt the deſign of forming its dictionary on a new plan. They were to have deduced the hiſtory of each word from the period in which it had appeared in the language, to give the various meanings which it aſſumed in different ages, and the various acceptations it had received, and to employ, in order to diſplay theſe varied ſhades, not capricious phraſes, but examples ſelected from authors of the greateſt authority. Then would have been ſeen the true literary and grammatical

matical dictionary of the language, and not only foreigners but even Frenchmen might, in that work, have acquired a knowledge of all its delicacy.

This dictionary would have presented instructive pages to men of letters, would have contributed to form the national taste, and arrested the progress of corruption. Each academician was to have explained a letter of the alphabet. Voltaire undertook the letter A; and, to excite the industry of his brethren, and to banish the difficulty of executing this plan, he was desirous to finish, within a few months, that part of the work which he had assumed.

His

His ſtrength was waſted by ſuch exceſſive application; and he had been much reduced by a ſpitting of blood, cauſed by his efforts during the repreſentation of Irene. Yet, the activity of his mind ſubdued all, and concealed from him the real weakneſs of his conſtitution. At length, deprived of ſleep by an irritation produced by too intenſe labour, he wiſhed to procure ſome hours repoſe, that he might be in a condition to lead the academy irrevocably to engage in the new dictionary, againſt which ſome objections had ariſen; and he reſolved to take opium. His imagination poſſeſſed all its vivacity, his ſoul was equally reſtleſs and impetuous, his character

abated

abated not of its gaiety and its vigour, when he took the opiate which he judged to be neceſſary. During the ſame evening, his friends had heard him expreſs his deteſtation of prejudices with his uſual eloquence; and ſoon after beheld him viewing them only on the ridiculous ſide, and deriding them with that peculiar grace and aptneſs which characteriſed his ſallies of wit. But he took the opiate at ſeveral doſes, and was deceived as to the quantity, probably in the ſpecies of intoxication which the firſt had produced. The ſame accident happened to him about thirty years before, and then placed his life in danger. Unhappily, this time, his

his waſted powers were unable to contend with the poiſon. He had long been ſubject to a complaint in the bladder, and in the general decay of his organs, that ſoon contracted an incurable diſeaſe.

Scarcely could he, during the long interval between this fatal accident and his death, preſerve his recollection for a few ſucceſſive moments, or diſengage himſelf from the lethargy in which he was plunged. To the young Count de Lalli, however, who was even then celebrated for his courage, and who has ſince deſerved celebrity by his eloquence and patriotiſm, he wrote, in one of

of theſe intervals, thoſe lines, the laſt which were traced by his hand, in which he applauds the royal authority whoſe juſtice had lately annulled one of the attrocious acts of parliamentary deſpotiſm. At length, he expired on the 30th of May, 1778.

The arrival of Voltaire at Paris had re-kindled the fury of the fanatics, and wounded the pride of the chiefs of the hierachy; but it had alſo inſpired ſome prieſts with an idea of building their reputation and their fortune on the converſion of this illuſtrious enemy. Certainly, they could not flatter themſelves with the hope of ſubduing him,

but they did not deſpair of inducing him to diſſemble. Voltaire, who wiſhed to remain at Paris without being tormented by ſacerdotal accuſations, and who, from a habit acquired in his youth, thought it beneficial to the intereſts even of the friends of reaſon, that certain ſcenes of intolerance ſhould not ſucceed his laſt moments, had ſent in the beginning of his malady for an almoner of the incurables, and who had boaſted of having reſtored to the boſom of the church the Abbé de L'Attaignant, known by offences of another kind.

The Abbé Gauthier confeſſed Voltaire, and received a profeſſion of faith from

from him by which he declared that he died in the catholic religion, in which he was born.

When this circumſtance was known, which offended enlightened men rather more than it edified the devotees, the curate of Saint Sulpice ran to his pariſhioner, who received him with politeneſs, and gave him according to uſage a handſome offering for his poor people. But, mortified that the Abbé Gauthier had anticipated him, he diſcovered that the almoner of the incurables had been too eaſily ſatisfied with his penitent, and that he ought to have required a more particular profeſſion of faith, and an expreſs diſavowal

of

of all the doctrines, contrary to orthodoxy, which Voltaire had been accused of maintaining. The Abbé Gauthiers pretended that, by requiring every thing, all would have been lost. During this dispute, Voltaire recovered, Irene was played, and the conversion was forgotten. But, in the moment of the relapse, the curate returned to Voltaire, absolutely resolved not to inter him, if he could not obtain the desired recantation of his errors.

This curate was among those men who are a mixture of hypocrisy and imbecility; he spoke with the obstinate persuasion of a maniac, and acted with

the flexibility of a jesuit; he was humble in his manners even to basenefs, arrogant in his sacerdotal pretensions, fawning with the great, and charitable to the populace who are governed by the priests that distribute alms to them, and in fine, he harrassed the simple citizens, by his imperious fanaticism. He earnestly wished to compel Voltaire at least to acknowledge the divine nature of Jesus Christ; to which he was more attached than to any other dogma. He, one day, drew Voltaire from his lethargy, by shouting in his ear: "Do you believe the Divinity of Jesus Christ?"——"In the name of God, sir," replied Voltaire, "speak to me

no

no more of that man; but let me die in peace."

The prieſt then declared that he was compelled to refuſe him burial; but he was not authoriſed in this refuſal; for, according to the laws, it ought to have been preceded by a ſentence of excommunication, or a ſecular judgment; and even an appeal might have been made againſt an excommunication, as a matter of abuſe. Voltaire's family, by complaining to the parliament, would have obtained juſtice; but they feared the fanaticiſm of that body and the hatred of its members to Voltaire, who had ſo often combated its pretenſions

and exerted his powers againſt its in-juſtice. They did not perceive that the parliament could not, without diſ-grace to itſelf, depart from the princi-ples on which it had acted in favour of the Janſeniſts; they did not know that a great number of the young magiſtrates waited only for an occaſion of effacing, by ſome ſplendid act, the reproach of fanaticiſm by which they were degraded, of dignifying themſelves, by ordaining a mark of reſpect to the memory of a man of genius whom they had been un-fortunate enough to number among their enemies, and of ſhewing that they choſe rather to atone for their injuſtice, than to yield to any incitements of ven-

geance. The friends of Voltaire did not obſerve how much power they had acquired by that enthuſiaſm which his name had excited; an enthuſiaſm which had gained every claſs in the nation, and which no authority would venture openly to inſult.

They choſe rather to negociate with government. Daring neither to offend public opinion by gratifying the vengeance of the clergy, nor to diſpleaſe the prieſts by compelling them to obey the laws, fearing to mortify ſacerdotal pride ſhould they erect a public monument to a great man whoſe aſhes were baſely diſturbed by prieſts, or

ſhould they indemnify his memory for the loſs of eccleſiaſtic honours, to which he had ſo little claim, by civic honours due to his genius and the ſervices he had done the nation, miniſters approved a propoſal which was made of removing Voltaire's body to the church of a monaſtery, of which his nephew was abbé. It was accordingly conducted to Scellières, and the prieſts agreed not to interrupt the execution of this deſign. However, two ladies, of diſtinguiſhed rank and very great devotees, wrote to the biſhop of Troyes to engage him, in quality of diocean biſhop, to oppoſe the burial. But, fortunately for the honour of the

biſhop,

biſhop, theſe letters arrived too late, and Voltaire was interred.

The French academy had obſerved a cuſtom of ſaying maſs at the church of the Cordeliers for each of their deceaſed members. The archbiſhop of Paris, Beaumont, ſo well known by his ignorance and fanaticiſm, prohibited the performance of the ceremony. The Cordeliers obeyed with regret; but they knew that the confeſſors of the archbiſhop would pardon his ſpirit of revenge, and would forbear to recommend juſtice to him. The academy, therefore, reſolved to ſuſpend the practice of this ceremony till the inſult offered

to the moſt illuſtrious of its members ſhould be repaired. Thus Beaumont became, in deſpight of himſelf, the inſtrument of deſtroying a ridiculous ſuperſtition.

Mean while the king of Pruſſia commanded a ſolemn maſs to be ſaid for Voltaire in the catholic church of Berlin; and the academy of Pruſſia was invited to attend. But that which was more glorious to Voltaire, was, that the king in the field of battle, where at the head of an hundred and fifty thouſand men he defended the rights of the princes of the empire and impoſed laws on the Auſtrian power, wrote

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the eulogium of that illuſtrious man, whoſe diſciple and friend he had been, and who perhaps had never pardoned him the unworthy and diſgraceful violence which he had endured at Franckfort, but towards whom the monarch was inceſſantly and involuntarily led by his natural taſte and his admiration of genius. This eulogium nobly compenſated for the mean vengeance of the prieſts.

Of all the enormities which, in the times of ignorance and ſuperſtition, the prieſts have obtained the power of committing againſt human nature with impunity, that which is exerciſed on the

the bodies of the deceafed is unquef-tionably the leaft prejudicial; and, in the eyes of enlightened men, thofe out-rages can appear no other than a title to renown. Yet, refpect for the re-mains of men who have been dear to us is no prejudice; it is an affection in-fpired by nature herfelf, who has plac-ed, in the receffes of our hearts, a veneration for every thing that can re-cal to our remembrance beings whom friendfhip or gratitude have rendered facred to our feelings. The liberty of offering a forrowful homage to their afhes is then a precious right to delicate minds, and the power of chufing that which their fenfations fhall dictate, can-

not,

not, without injuſtice, be taken away; ſtill leſs may this conſolation be forbidden at the will of an intolerant ſect, who have uſurped, with an audacity too long endured, the right of controuling the thoughts of men, or of inflicting puniſhment for them.

Beſide, the empire of prejudice over the minds of the populace is not yet deſtroyed; a Chriſtian deprived of burial is ſtill, in the eyes of inferior people, the object of horror and diſdain; and this injuſtice is extended even to his family. If, indeed, the hatred of prieſts would purſue none but men who are immortalized by their works and whoſe glory

glory embraces all ages, we might pardon their despicable efforts; but their hatred may be attached to victims less illustrious; and all men have the same rights.

Government, in some degree ashamed of its feeble conduct, hoped to escape public contempt by prohibiting the naming of Voltaire in any writings, or in those places where the police was accustomed to violate the freedom of speech, under the pretence of preserving order, which it too often confounded with a respect paid to established and protected follies.

The

The public papers were forbidden to ſpeak of his death; and the comedians had orders to perform none of his pieces. Miniſters did not diſcover that means like theſe, of preventing the anger of the nation againſt their weakneſs, would only ſerve more fully to provoke it; and to demonſtrate that they had neither courage to merit the approbation nor to ſupport the blame of the public.

This ſimple recital of the incidents of the life of Voltaire has ſufficiently developed his character and his mind; the principal features of which were benevolence, indulgence for human foibles, and a hatred of injuſtice and oppreſſion.

oppreſſion. He may be numbered among the very few men in whom the love of humanity was a real paſſion; which, the nobleſt of all paſſions, was known only to modern times, and took riſe from the progreſs of knowledge. Its very exiſtence is ſufficient to confound the blind partiſans of antiquity, and thoſe who calumniate philoſophy.

But the happy qualities of Voltaire were often perverted by his natural reſtleſſneſs, which the writing of tragedy had but increaſed. In an inſtant he would change from anger to affection, from indignation to a jeſt.' Born with violent paſſions, they often hurried

him

him too far; and his reſtleſſneſs deprived him of the advantages which uſually accompany ſuch minds; particularly of that fortitude to which fear is no obſtacle, when action becomes a duty, and which is not ſhaken by the preſence of danger foreſeen. Often would Voltaire expoſe himſelf to the ſtorm with raſhneſs, but rarely did he brave it with conſtancy; and theſe intervals, of temerity and weakneſs, have frequently afflicted his friends, and afforded unworthy cauſe of triumph to his cowardly foes.

His affections were permanent, and his friendſhip for Génonville, the preſident

ſident de Maiſons, Formont, Cideville, the Marchioneſs du Chatelet, d'Argental, and d'Alembert, ſeldom obſcured by paſſing clouds, ended only with his life. From his works we diſcover that few men of feeling have ſo long preſerved the remembrance of friends loſt in early youth.

He has been reproached with his numerous diſputes, but in none of theſe he was the aggreſſor. His enemies, thoſe at leaſt to whom he was irreconcileable, and whom he devoted to the world's contempt, did not confine themſelves to perſonal attacks; they were his accuſers to the fanatics, and wiſhed

wiſhed to bring down the ſword of perſecution on his head. It is no doubt afflicting to be obliged to place in this liſt men of real merit; men like the poet Rouſſeau, the two Pompignans *, Larcher, and even Rouſſeau of Geneva. But is it not more excuſable to carry vengeance too far, in ſelf-defence, and

* One of them has lately, by his noble and patriotic conduct, effaced the ſpots which his epiſcopal accuſations had fixed upon his reputation. He is at preſent ſeen to adopt the ſame principles of freedom, with fortitude, for which in his works he bitterly reproached philoſophers, and againſt which he invoked the vengeance of deſpotiſm. It would be wrong to accuſe him of wilful tergiverſation: nothing is more common than men who, to a worthy mind and integrity of underſtanding, join timidity; and dare not examine certain principles, nor think for themſelves on certain ſubjects, till firſt ſupported by public opinion.

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to be unjuſt in the indulgence of anger, the firſt motive of which is founded in rectitude, than to violate the rights of man, by endangering the freedom and ſafety of a citizen, to gratify pride, the aims of hypocriſy, or an obſtinate attachment to opinions?

Voltaire has been cenſured, for his attacks on Maupertuis; but were not theſe attacks confined to the mere act of rendering a man eternally ridiculous, who, by baſe intrigues, had endeavoured to diſhonour and ruin him; and who, to revenge ſome jeſts, had called the power of a king, irritated by his inſidious arts, to his aid?

Voltaire, it is ſaid, was envious; which has been anſwered by the following line, from Tancred:

De qui dans l'univers peut-il être jalouſe ?*

Yes, he was envious of Buffon. What! could the man whoſe mighty arm had ſhaken the antique pillars of the temple of ſuperſtition, and who aſpired to metamorphoſe the vile herd which ſo long had groaned under the ſacerdotal rod into men, could he be envious of the lucky and ſplendid deſcription of the manners of a few animals; or the

* Does the world contain a man whom he might envy?

more or lefs fortunate combination of fome fyftems, the falfity of which is proved by facts?

He was envious of J. J. Rouffeau. The boldnefs of Rouffeau did indeed excite that of Voltaire: but was the philofopher who beheld the progrefs of knowledge, polifhing, emancipating, and perfecting the human fpecies, and who enjoyed the revolution as his proper work, was he jealous of the eloquent writer who wifhed to condemn the mind of man to eternal ignorance? Could the enemy of bigotry be jealous of him who, not finding fufficient fame

in

in the deſtruction of its altars, vainly endeavoured to rebuild them?

Voltaire did not do juſtice to the genius of Rouſſeau, becauſe his mind being equitable, and void of affectation, felt an involuntary repugnance to exaggeration; becauſe a tone of auſterity preſented to his fancy a tincture of hypocricy, the ſmalleſt ſhade of which could not but diſguſt his frank and independent ſoul; and becauſe, being accuſtomed himſelf to treat all ſubjects with humour, gravity in the little details of paſſion, or of human life, always appeared to him to partake of the ridiculous. He was unjuſt, becauſe Rouſſeau

had angered him, by returning injury to offers of ſervice; had accuſed him of perſecution, when he was employed in his defence, and had himſelf directed the hand of perſecution toward Voltaire.

He was jealous of Monteſquieu. He had cauſe to complain of the author of the ſpirit of laws, who affected to treat him with indifference, and almoſt with contempt; partly from fooliſh pride, and partly from timid policy. Yet the celebrated ſaying of Voltaire, that "Humanity had loſt its claims, and that Monteſquieu found and reſtored them," is the beſt eulogium ever pronounced on

on the ſpirit of laws, and even exceeds the limits of juſtice. It is only true relatively to France; ſince, without mentioning the works of Althuſius * and ſome others, the rights of man were reclaimed with more energy and candour in the works of Locke and Sidney, than in thoſe of Monteſquieu.

Voltaire often criticiſed the ſpirit of laws, but uſually with juſtice. The proof that he was right, in attacking Monteſquieu, is that we now perceive the moſt abſurd and fatal prejudices

* A German lawyer, of the XVI. century, who maintained at that time that all power originated in the people.

finding ſupport by quoting works of that celebrated man; which, had not the progreſs of knowledge at length broken the fetters forged by the dogmas of authority, concerning queſtions which ought only to be ſubmitted to the teſt of reaſon, would in the preſent day have done more miſchief to France, than they have done good to Europe. The enthuſiaſtic partiſans of Monteſquieu have affirmed that Voltaire was incapable either of judging or of underſtanding his works. Irritated by ſuch aſſertions, he well might mingle a little ill humour with juſt remark; in which he would be ſanctioned by haughtineſs ſo ridiculous.

The

The faſhion of taxing Voltaire with envy was ſo prevalent, that to this paſſion have been attributed his ſage obſervations on the work of Helvetius; which, from reſpect to a perſecuted philoſopher, he had the delicacy not to publiſh during the life of that writer. Nay, his very anger at the ſhort lived ſucceſs of ſome ill written tragedies was called envy; as if anger could not be felt, except relatively to ſelf, at ſeeing fame uſurped, which is ſo often fatal to the progreſs of philoſophy and the arts. How much has the praiſe ſo prodigally beſtowed on Richelieu, Colbert, and other miniſters, impeded the advancement of reaſon, in the ſcience of politics!

While

While we read the works of Voltaire, we perceive no man perhaps ever poſſeſſed accuracy of underſtanding in a ſuperior degree. This he preſerved in the enthuſiaſm of poety, as well as in the exuberance of humour; this was ever the guide of his taſte and of his opinions, and is one of the principal reaſons of the inexpreſſible charms which are diſcovered, in the peruſal of his works. No mind perhaps ever combined more ideas at a time, decided with more rapid ſagacity, or diſplayed more depth, in whatever required a laborious analyſis or continued meditation. The ſtrength of his eagle-eye often has aſtoniſhed even thoſe who

were

were indebted to ſimilar means for ideas the moſt profound, and combinations the moſt extenſive and preciſe. In converſation he has often been known to ſelect the beſt of a multitude of ideas, to arrange them in the moſt perſpicacious and effectual manner, and to clothe them in the moſt happy and brilliant language.

Hence the ineſtimable advantage of being ever clear and unaffected without inſipidity, and of being read with equal pleaſure by the moſt ignorant, as well as by the moſt enlightened. Reading his works with reflection, we find in them a multitude of profoundly philo-

philosophic and true maxims; which escape superficial readers, because they do not enforce attention, nor require any effort to be understood.

If we consider him as a poet, we shall find that, of the various species which he attempted, the ode and comedy were the only ones in which he did not deserve the highest rank. He failed in comedy because, as it has previously been remarked, he had the gift of seizing the ridiculous of opinion, but not of character, such as could be put in action, and which alone is proper for comedy. Not that, in a country where the

the mind of man ſhould have freed itſelf from all its bonds, and in which philoſophy ſhould have become popular, abſurd and dangerous opinions might not be ſucceſsfully exhibited on the ſtage: but this kind of freedom is at preſent no where to be found.

To him poetry is indebted for the liberty of exerciſing itſelf in a field more vaſt. He has ſhewn how it may be united with philoſophy; ſo that poetry, without being deprived of any of its charms, riſes to new beauties; and philoſophy, without being dry or inflated, preſerves its accuracy and depth.

We

We cannot read his theatrical writings, without obſerving that to him the tragic art is indebted, for the whole progreſs which it has made ſince Racine: nor can even thoſe who refuſe him ſuperiority, or equality, of poetical talents, without ſtupidity or injuſtice, deny this progreſs. His latter tragedies prove, that he was far from ſuppoſing he had carried this ſo difficult art to its utmoſt extent: he was ſenſible that tragedy might ſtill approach more nearly to nature, without being deprived of its pomp and dignity; that it ſtill addicted itſelf too much to local manners; that the love of women was a too frequent ſubject; that their paſ-

ſions

ſions ought to be repreſented on the ſtage as they exiſt in life, and their affection firſt diſcovered only by the efforts made to conceal it, and not publicly avowed, unleſs in thoſe moments when exceſs of danger, or of misfortune, no longer admit of diſguiſe. He thought too that characters void of affectation, great by nature, and ſtrangers to intereſt and ambition, might afford a ſource of new beauties, and impart to tragedy more variety and truth. But he became too feeble to execute his own conceptions; and, if we except the father of Irene, we ſhall find his latter tragedies rather leſſons than models.

If,

If, therefore, eſpecially in the arts, the man of genius be he who by enriching them has moſt extended their limits, who has merited this title more than Voltaire? yet has it been refuſed him by writers, moſt of whom were, indeed, too deſtitute of genius themſelves to feel its true characteriſtics.

To Voltaire we are indebted for having taken a more extenſive and uſeful view of hiſtory than the ancients. It has in his writings become, not a narrative of events, not the picture of the revolutions of a nation, but that of human nature, painted from the life, and the philoſophic reſult of the

experience

experience of all people, and of all ages. He firſt introduced true criticiſm into hiſtory; firſt ſhewed that the natural probability of accidents ought to be admitted, as proofs for or againſt hiſtorical authenticity; and that the philoſophic hiſtorian ought, not only to reject miracles, but ſcrupulouſly to examine the motives for crediting thoſe facts which depart from the common order of nature.

Perhaps he may occaſionally have forgotten the ſage rule which he himſelf invented, and which, rigorouſly adhered to, may demonſtrate truth. Still to him we are indebted for having

freed hiſtory from that croud of extraor- dinary incidents, adopted without proof, which, making the greateſt impreſſion on the mind, blinded men to the moſt natural and the beſt demonſtrated facts. Before his time men knew little of hiſ- tory, except the fables by which it was disfigured. He ſhewed that the abſur- dities of politheiſm had never been the religion of any but the vulgar, among the greateſt nations; and that the belief of one God, common to all people, had no need of being revealed by ſuperna- tural means. He proved that all na- tions have practiſed the grand princi- ples of morality, and with increaſing purity in proportion as they were more civilized

civilized, and better informed. He taught us that the influence of religion has often corrupted, but never improved morality.

As a philoſopher, he was the firſt to afford an example of a private citizen, who, by his wiſhes and his endeavours, embraced the general hiſtory of man in every country and in every age, oppoſing error and oppreſſion of every kind, and defending and promulgating every uſeful truth.

The hiſtory of whatever has been done in Europe, in favour of reaſon and humanity, is the hiſtory of his la-

bours and beneficent acts. If the absurd and dangerous custom of interring the dead within the walls of cities, and even in churches, has been abolished in some countries; if, on the continent of Europe, men, by means of innoculation, have, in part, escaped a disease which threatened life, and often was destructive of happiness; if the catholic clergy have lost their dangerous power, and will soon be deprived of their scandalous wealth; if the liberty of the press be increased; if Sweden, Russia, Poland, Prussia, and the dominions of the house of Austria have beheld the tyranny of intolerance vanish; if even in France, and some of the provinces

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of Italy, it has ſuffered attacks; if the ſhameful remains of feudal vaſſalage has been ſhaken in Ruſſia, Denmark, Bohemia, and France; if Poland now feels its injuſtice and danger; if abſurd and barbarous laws have been generally aboliſhed, or are threatened with approaching deſtruction; if the neceſſity of reforming the adminiſtration of public juſtice be every where felt; if the continent of Europe has been taught that men poſſeſs a right to the uſe of reaſon; if religious prejudices have been eradicated from the higher claſſes of ſociety, and in part effaced from the hearts of the common people; if their defenders have been reduced to the

ſhameful neceſſity of maintaining their political utility; if the love of humanity be now the common language of all governments; if wars ſhould become leſs frequent, and if the pride of kings, or claims which the ruſt of time has concealed, be no longer alledged as the pretence for their commencement; if we have beheld the maſk ſtripped from the face of religious ſectaries, who were privileged in impoſſing on the world; and if reaſon for the firſt time has begun to ſhed its clear and uniform light over all Europe; we ſhall every where diſcover, in the hiſtory of the changes that have been effected, the name of Voltaire; and ſhall every where

where find him beginning the battle, or deciding the victory.

But generally obliged to conceal his intentions, and maſk his attacks, though his works are in every hand, the principles of his philoſophy are but little known.

Ignorance and error are the ſole cauſe of the miſery of man; and the errors of ſuperſtition are the moſt fatal, becauſe they corrupt every ſource of reaſon; and their deſtructive enthuſiaſm teaches their adherents to commit crimes without remorſe. That mildneſs of manners which is compatible with every

form of government diminiſhes evils, the cure of which reaſon muſt one day effect, and impedes their progreſs. Oppreſſion itſelf, in a humane nation, aſſumes the character of the people; and is rarely guilty of great barbarity, in a country where arts and eſpecially literature are beloved. Freedom of thinking is tolerated out of reſpect to them, though men want the fortitude to love it for its own ſake.

Our endeavours, therefore, ſhould be to inſpire the mild and conſolatory virtues, which lead to reaſon, which all men may practice, which agree with every poliſhed age, and which

may

may teach hypocrify itfelf fome good. They fhould particularly be prefered to thofe aufterc morals which feldom exift, in common minds, without a mixture of unfeeling feverity; which are to hypocrify at once fo eafy and fo dangerous; which often terrify tyrants but feldom confole mankind; and the neceffity of which proves the misfortune of thofe nations whofe hiftory they adorn.

By informing mankind, and by rendering them more humane, we beft may hope to lead them the fureft and eafieft road to freedom. But we neither can hope to fpread knowledge nor

foften

ſoften the manners of nations, if frequent wars accuſtom them to the ſhedding of blood without remorſe, and to contemn the fame which awaits on the arts of peace; or if, occupied in oppreſſion or in ſelf-defence, men ſhould continue to eſtimate their virtue by the ill they have been able to do, and imagine the art of killing to be the art of moſt utility.

The more men are enlightened the more they will be free, and the leſs difficult will be the attainment of freedom. But let us not teach oppreſſors to form a league againſt reaſon; let us conceal from them the neceſſary and

firm

firm union which exifts between knowledge and liberty ; and let us not too foon inform them that a nation without prejudice muft inftantly be free.

If we except theocracies, it is the *immediate intereft* of all governments that the people fhould be humane and enlightened. Let us not teach them that their more *diftant intereft* is to leave men in a ftate of ignorance. Let us not oblige them to choofe between the intereft of pride and that of repofe and fame. To induce them to love reafon, fhe muft always appear in a gentle and peaceful form ; and, far from terrifying them by imprudent threats, while fhe

afks

afks their fupport muft offer her own. If we attack oppreffors before we have taught the oppreffed, we fhall rifk the lofs of liberty and the death of reafon. Hiftory affords proofs of this truth. How often, in defpite of the generous efforts of the friends of freedom, has a fingle battle reduced nations to the flavery of ages!

And what is the kind of liberty enjoyed by thofe nations which have recovered it by force of arms, and not by the force of reafon? It has been temporary freedom, and fo difturbed by ftorms that it remains doubtful whether it were or were not an advantage. Have

not

not moſt of them confounded the forms of republicaniſm with the enjoyment of right, and the deſpotiſm of numbers with freedom. How many unjuſt laws, contrary to the rights of nature, have diſhonoured the code of all nations which have recovered their liberty, during thoſe ages in which reaſon was ſtill in its childhood!

Why not profit by this fatal experience, and wiſely wait the progreſs of knowledge, in order to obtain freedom more effectual, more ſubſtantial, and more peaceful? Why purchaſe it by torrents of blood, and inevitable confuſion, and give that to chance which

time

time muſt certainly and without blood-ſhed beſtow? In order to be more free and to be ever ſo, we ſhould wait the time when men, releaſed from their prejudices and guided by reaſon, will be worthy of freedom, becauſe they will know what are its true claims.

What therefore is the duty of a philoſopher? To attack ſuperſtition; to point out peace, wealth, and power to governments, as the infallible rewards of thoſe laws which ſecure religious liberty; and to teach them how much they have to fear from prieſts, whoſe ſecret influence will ever menace the repoſe of nations in which the liberty

berty of the prefs is under the leaft re-ftraint. For, previous to the invention of the art of printing, it was impoffible to fhake off this fhameful and fatal yoke: and, till facerdotal authority fhall be entirely annihilated by reafon, there will be no medium between ab-folute ignorance and dangerous com-motion.

The philofopher will fhew that, without freedom of thought, the fpirit of the clergy muft again produce affaffi-nation, tortures, profcriptions, and civil wars; and that, by enlightening the people only can nations, and kings, be fecured from fuch facred crimes. He

will prove that men who wifh for ab-folute power over the mind will employ force inftead of reafon, will oblige con-fcience to cede to their dogmas, and, far from affording morality a more folid bafis by combining it with religious notions, will corrupt and deftroy it; while they feek, not to promulgate virtue, but, to make their adherents the blind inftruments of their ambition and avarice. Should he be afked what is to be the fubftitute of the prejudices thus deftroyed, he would anfwer—"I have delivered you from a wild beaft, which was devouring you, and you afk for a fubftitute."

Were

Were he to be reproached with repeating the ſame theme too often, and with too obſtinately attacking errors in themſelves beneath contempt, he will reply—They are not contemptible while credited by the vulgar. And, though it be leſs glorious to combat vulgar error than to teach new truths to ſages, it is neceſſary, in order to break the bonds of reaſon and to open a free road to truth, to prefer utility to fame.

Inſtead of proving that ſuperſtition is the ſupport of deſpotiſm, if he write to people under an arbitrary government, he will prove that it is the enemy of kings; and of theſe two truths

he will purpofely dwell upon that which may aid the caufe of humanity; and not on that by which it may be injured, becaufe liable to be mifunderftood.

Inftead of declaring war againft defpotifm, before reafon fhall have affembled fufficient powers, and calling nations to the banners of freedom, who neither love it nor underftand what freedom is, he will enumerate to them and their governors the various oppreffions which are common to them all, and which it is as well the intereft of thofe who command as of thofe who obey to root out. To fimplify and humanize the laws, to counteract the oppreffion of fubordinate

2 tyranny,

tyranny, to break off the ſhackles with which falſe policy may have encumbered the induſtry and liberty of trade, in order that freedom may be the only happineſs wanting to mankind, and that nations worthy of freedom may be preſented to her, ſuch will be his efforts, ſuch his theme.

Such is the reſult of the philoſophy of Voltaire, and ſuch the ſpirit which pervades his works.

Let men, who, if he had not written, would ſtill have been the ſlaves of prejudice, or would have trembled to confeſs they had ſhaken of its yoke,

accuſe Voltaire of having betrayed the intereſts of freedom, becauſe he defended it without fanaticiſm and imprudence; let them judge him by thoſe enlightened principles which were ten years poſterior to his death and half a century to his philoſophy, and which, but for him, had ever remained the ſecret opinions of ſages; let them condemn him for having diſtinguiſhed between the good, which may exiſt without liberty, and the happineſs to which liberty only gives birth; let them forbear to perceive that had Voltaire infuſed into his firſt writings the principles of freedom of the elder Brutus, or in other words of American independence,

pendence, neither Montefquieu nor Rouffeau would have written as they have done; that if, like the author of the *Syftême de la Nature*, he had invited the kings of Europe to fupport the power of the priefts*, Europe would ftill have been fuperftitious, and would long have remained in bondage; and let them forget that in books, as in behaviour, we ought to difplay the courage only which the occafion re-

* The tranflator fpeaks from memory, but he believes himfelf juftified in faying that this accufation of the author of the *Syftême de la Nature* is falfe, whofe doctrine, if he does not grofsly miftake, was, that the defpotic power of kings and priefts was founded in reciprocal fupport, and that defpotifm of every kind was equally hateful and deftructive.

quires; their injuftice will but little injure the glory of Voltaire. Men of genius muft be his judges, men who can difcover, in a fucceffion of various works, as well from their form and ftyle as from their principles, the fecret plan of a philofopher, who is waging continual but bold and artful war on prejudice; rather intent on conqueft than on renown; too great to be vain of his opinions, and too much the friend of the human race not to make their utility the grand object of his purfuits.

Voltaire has been accufed of partiality to monarchial government, but this accufation

accuſation only can impoſe on ſuch as have not read his works. It is true he hated, beyond even monarchial power, ariſtocratic deſpotiſm, which unites rigour to hypocriſy and tyranny more auſtere to morals more perverſe; nor was he ever the dupe of the parliaments of France, or the nobles of Sweden and Poland, who give the name of freedom to the chains with which they would load their vaſſals. In this opinion, Voltaire has been joined by all philoſophers who have ſought the definition of a free ſtate in the nature and mind of man, and not, like the pedant Mably, in examples, drawn from

the tyrannical anarchies of Italy and Greece.

He has been blamed for having beftowed too much praife on the pomp of the court of Louis XIV. and accufation was in this inftance well founded; it was the only prejudice of his youth which he never fhook off, and there are few men who can hope they have vanquifhed all their errors. It has been afferted, that he fuppofed celebrated artifts, orators, and poets, were all that were neceffary to render a people happy, but never could he entertain fuch a thought. He fuppofed, indeed,

indeed, that arts and literature poliſhed the manners of men, and made the road of reaſon ſmooth and ſafe, and that the love of them rendered thoſe who govern beneficent of heart, often prevented them from committing acts of violence and injuſtice, and that, under equal circumſtances, the moſt ingenious and poliſhed people would always be the leaſt wretched.

His pious enemies have taxed him with having aſſaulted, by wilful miſquotation, the religion of his country, and extending incredulity even to atheiſm; both of which charges are equally

falſe.

falfe. Among a multitude of objections, founded on proofs and on paffages cited from books, fuppofed to have been infpired by God himfelf, a very fmall number of errors only can be difcovered; and thofe cannot be imputed to him as wilful miftakes, becaufe, comparing them to the numerous accurate quotations and facts related with precifion, it is evident that nothing could have been of lefs ufe to his caufe. When contending with his adverfaries, his maxim continually was, nothing ought to be credited which is not proved, and every thing fhould be rejected which is offenfive to reafon and probability;

bability; and the anſwer he has continually received was, whatever cannot be demonſtrated an impoſſibility ought to be adopted and adored.

He conſtantly appeared to be perſuaded of the exiſtence of a Supreme Being, but without remaining blind to the ſtrength of the objections oppoſed to that opinion. While he thought he beheld the regular order of nature, he could not but perceive thoſe ſtriking irregularities which he was unable to explain.

This was his perſuaſion, though it was far from that abſolute certainty in

the preſence of which all difficulties vaniſh: the work entitled, *Il faut prendre un parti, ou le principe d'action* *, perhaps contains the ſtrongeſt proofs of the exiſtence of a Supreme Being, which men have yet been able to collect.

He believed as much of free will as a rational man can believe; that is, he believed man has the power to reſiſt inclination, and to weigh the motives of action.

His incertitude reſpecting ſpirit was almoſt abſolute, and even concerning

* Decide we muſt, or the principle of action.

the

the exiſtence of the ſoul after the deceaſe of the body; but as he imagined this opinion, as well as that of the exiſtence of a God, was beneficial, he rarely allowed himſelf to mention his doubts, and generally dwelt rather on the proofs than on the objections.

Such was the philoſophy of Voltaire; and we, perhaps, ſhall find, while we read his life, that he has been more admired than known; that though gaul abounds in ſome few of his polemical writings, his predominant ſenſation was active benevolence; that his affection for the unfortunate exceeded

his hatred of his enemies; and that the paſſion of fame in him was ever ſubordinate to the more noble love of humanity. Superior to the oſtentation of virtue, or to the concealment of his foibles, which he would ſometimes candidly confeſs, though not proudly proclaim, few men ever exiſted whoſe lives have been more honoured by acts of greater worth or leſs ſullied by hypocriſy. In fine, let it be remembered that when, on the pinnacle of fame, after having rendered the French ſtage illuſtrious by his genius, and while throughout Europe he exercifed a degree of power over the minds of men hitherto

hitherto unparalleled, the following pathetic line,

J'ai fait un peu de bien, c'est mon meilleur ouvrage *.

was the unaffected expression of that habitual benevolence, which had taken possession of his soul.

* The little good I've done, that is my best of works!

END OF THE LIFE OF VOLTAIRE.